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The Kanter Girls.
by
Mary L. B. Branch
with pictures by
Helen Maitland Armstrong.
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To John and Nan

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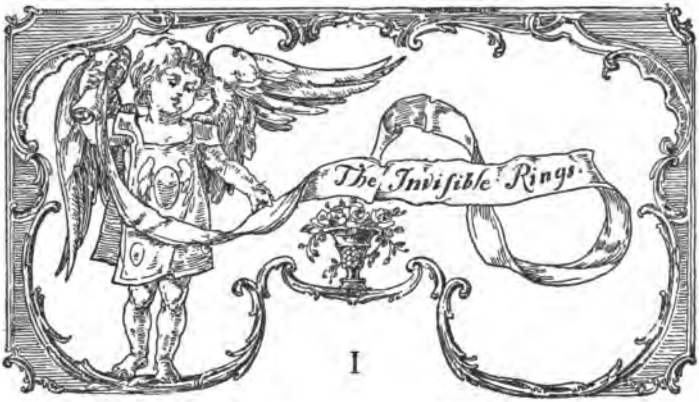
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The title-page, ornamental head-bands, and the pictures are from original drawings by Helen Maitland Armstrong

List of Illustrations

The Kanter Girls.



"I dreamt I caught a little owl
And the bird was blue—
But you may hunt forever
And not find such an one."
—*Christina Rossetti.*

"In birds, as men, there is a strange variety."
--*Mary Howitt.*

THE names of the two Kanter girls were Janet and Prue. They lived in a snug brown cottage at the foot of a steep woody hill, and in front of the cottage there was a yard with plenty of room for playing, besides flower-beds full of poppies, marigolds, larkspurs, and asters. There was also a fine large apple-tree, whose lower limbs were quite within reach, and this apple-tree was the beginning of wonders, for in it an unusual kind of bluebird built her nest. The Kanter girls saw her first when she was bringing little sticks and

twigs to build with, and they ran to tell their mother that the biggest, most beautiful bird in the world, bluer than the sky, had come to their apple-tree.

Their mother went to the door and looked out. The bird nodded to her kindly, and sang,

"How d'ye do? How d'ye do?"

"Pretty well, I thank you," she replied, and then she said to her little girls, "I never saw a bird like this before, it must have come for good luck, and you had better be friends with it."

She then went directly back to her housework, for anyone, who has ever had an ovenful of thin seed-cakes baking, knows that they cannot be left long.

"Janet," said Prue, "let's help pick up little sticks."

"Oh! yes, let's!" said Janet.

So they gathered sticks and straws, and laid them in a crotch of one of the apple-tree boughs for the bluebird, and with their help she finished her nest before night.

The Kanter girls sat in the doorway of the little cottage watching her. It was a pleasant hour, the sun was getting low, and its light flickered richly on the green grass. The flowers seemed more fragrant than at high noon, and the evening primroses



THE KANTER GIRLS SAT IN THE DOORWAY.

were getting ready to open. The girls sat side by side, they both had brown hair and rosy cheeks, they both wore blue print dresses and white aprons, and they looked happy and interested. Part of the time they talked about the bluebird, and part of the time about a queer story of which one of them had read one chapter at a neighbor's the week before. It was Prue who had read it.

"The story was called 'The Invisible Ring,'" she said. "A lady had an invisible ring. Anyone could see it till she put it on her finger, but the minute she put it on it was invisible, and she became invisible too."

"I wish I had an invisible ring," said Janet, "then I could go around to all the girls' houses, and hear what they said about me."

"If I had one," said Prue, "I would take it to school, and if I didn't know my lesson I would put it on just before the question came to me, and then the next one would have to answer it."

"And if we met robbers coming through the woods, we could put our rings on and the robbers wouldn't see us!" said Janet. "Oh! I do wish we had invisible rings."

"*Peep into my nest! Peep into my nest!*" sang the great, blue, beautiful bird in the apple-tree.

The Kanter girls never thought of disobeying. They ran to the tree at once, and one held the other up in her arms to reach the nest.



"Oh! there are two eggs in it!" cried the one who could reach.

"*Take them up, and take them down!*" sang the bird. So the little Kanter girl took the eggs in her hand, and slipped down to the ground. Then she and her sister sat on the doorstep again to look at them. They were small and smooth and bluer than the sky.

"*Lift up the covers!*" sang the bird.

That sounded so odd that the Kanter girls laughed, but they touched the eggs carefully, which turned out after all to be tiny blue boxes, and the lids flew up disclosing in each box a lovely little gold ring.

"Oh! oh!" cried Prue.

"Oh! oh!" cried Janet, and she slipped hers on her finger.

"Why, Janet, where did you go?" asked Prue, staring all about.

"I'm right here!" said Janet, taking off the ring and re-appearing at once at her side. Prue looked at her in surprise, and then tried on her own gold ring.

"Why, Prue, where *have* you gone?" exclaimed Janet, looking frightened.

"I'm right here, of course," said Prue, re-appearing on the doorstep. Then they understood it all and began to laugh for joy, for these were the invisible rings they had so much desired.

"Come, children, come and set the table," called their mother from the kitchen; "I see your father crossing the fields, and supper is nearly ready."

The Kanter girls were almost always quite willing to help, so they ran in at once, laid the table-cloth, and began to bring the dishes. All of a sudden there stood Prue alone by the table arranging the knives and forks, while from the pantry a tray of cups and saucers was coming apparently without hands. It just seemed to move along through the air.

"Oh! Janet, Janet!" cried Prue, laughing. "Mother, just look at Janet!"

"I don't see her anywhere," said the mother, glancing around.

"But just see the cups and saucers!"

At that moment the tray was set upon the table, and there stood Janet laughing.

"She's taken her ring off now," said Prue.

"I don't know what you are talking about," said their mother, and as her shortcake was burning in front of the fire, she had to hurry away.

Their father came in, the hot cake was put upon the table, with cookies, and bowls of bread and milk, and the little Kanter girls were so hungry, and found their supper so good, that they did not think much about their rings for a time. But when the table was cleared, and the dishes all set away clean upon the shelves, and when their father sat down to add up accounts, and their mother drew out her sewing-basket, and when the Kanter girls saw by the clock that it only lacked five minutes of eight (their bed-time was eight o'clock), they looked at each other with merry, mischievous eyes, and disappeared. Their mother thought it rather strange when she looked up and saw they had gone without so much as saying "good-night;" and she

thought it *very* strange when the little dog that had been dozing on the rug, suddenly began to bark and jump just as he did when the Kanter girls had a frolic with him. He stood up and begged, he walked around on his hind legs, and his tail wagged as if he had gone crazy.

"Be quiet, Tip!" said his master, who was making mistakes in his figures.

But instead of being quiet, Tip jumped up into a chair and gave a series of short, fierce barks.

"I never knew him to act so before, when the girls were not playing with him," said the mother, "and they went to bed some time ago. Let's put him out of doors!"

"Oh, no! we were only having a little good-night frolic!" exclaimed Prue and Janet, suddenly appearing on either side of their mother with a merry laugh.

"Then it *was* you, you mischiefs! Now be off to bed quick!" she said, and this time they really went, their young feet making a pleasant clatter on the stairs, and the murmur of their young voices in the room above gradually sinking away into stillness.

But the next morning, oh! then came the fun! The dew was hardly off the grass when the Kanter

girls, looking very demure in their clean dresses and white sunbonnets, started down the lane in search of adventures. Presently they saw two boys, a long way off, but coming toward them.

"Now let's see," said Janet, "what Tom and Billy Green are talking about!"

And immediately the two little Kanter girls disappeared, sun-bonnets and all.

"Say, Tom," said Billy, "I thought I saw the Kanter girls coming, but I guess they've run away."

"'Fraid of us, I guess," said Tom. "Remember that time I snowballed 'em last winter?"

"Yes, and Ned Wray knocked you down for it, and rubbed you with snow till you begged off."

"Be quiet, will you? Where did you say you saw that nest of young birds?"

"Right ahead there, in that old gnarly pear-tree. Easy to climb, ain't it?"

"Real easy," said Tom; "we'll take the young ones home in our pockets, and make a rush cage for 'em, and if they don't die, we'll tame 'em."

By this time the boys reached the foot of the tree, and Billy was beginning to climb, when he suddenly dropped on the ground with a howl and clapped his hands over his ears.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom, astonished.

"Something boxed my ears then! A regular whack! Ow! ow!"

"Oh, pshaw!" said Tom, "you hit against a bough, or something. I wouldn't cry for that!"

"*Wouldn't* you?" said Billy, angrily, as he rose to his feet and started up the tree again. His hands reached the lower bough, but instead of pulling himself up, there he hung. The old birds were uttering cries of terror overhead. Was this bad boy going to take their darlings?

"Well, why don't you get up?" asked Tom, impatiently.

"Can't do it! What's caught my feet? I feel as if a fifty-pound weight hung on each of 'em. There, I give it up, the old tree's bewitched. Get your birds yourself, if you want 'em."

And with a scared, sulky look he dropped to the ground. Tom pushed scornfully by him and tried the tree himself. He had nearly brought his knees up to the first bough, when, as he said afterward, something pushed him back so powerfully that he fell heels over head to the ground.

"There, now!" exclaimed Bill. He and his brother stared at the tree, and at each other, for a moment, and then, struck by a common terror, they

turned and ran for their lives. They were almost out of sight, and still running, when the two Kanter girls suddenly stood beneath the tree, a little flushed in their faces, but very happy and exultant.

"You needn't be afraid any more, birdies!" said Prue, looking up. "They will never dare to touch *this* tree again!"

"I can climb better than Tom Green," said Janet, "but I'd be ashamed to hurt little baby-birds. *Didn't* he look scared when I pushed him! Have you put your ring safe in your pocket, Prue?"

"Yes, and now let's take that path through the woods. I have always wanted to walk there, and if there *should* happen to be bears, we can put on our rings, you know, and they won't see us."

"Well, come then," said Janet, and the two Kanter girls took hold of hands, and ran across the pleasant sunny field till they reached the woods. There it looked dark and gloomy, the trees were so tall, and their branches so interlaced, while the thick underbrush seemed as if it might hold dreadful things in hiding. But the path was wide and mossy, and Janet said she almost knew they would come to checker-berries before long; so they walked bravely into the dark green woods like two innocent little Red-Riding-Hoods.



In The Woods

II

"And *anything* might come at last
  Out of those heaps of shade,
I would stay beside you
  If I were not afraid!"
    —*Poems Written for a Child.*

HERE and there the path took a turn to avoid some cliff or big bowlder, so that before long they had quite lost sight of the entrance; but that they did not mind, it was so much pleasanter than they expected, wandering along. The moss was deep and rich, with fairy-cups in it, and there was "prince's pine" along the edges of the rocks, and pretty little white bell-flowers growing. The children gathered some of them in their hands.

Presently they came to a spring of clear water at the foot of a great rock, where they stopped, and bending over dipped in their hands, curving their palms like little cups, and drank all they wanted. Then, picking up the flowers they had dropped, they were just going to move on, when, from the

underbrush a few rods before them, two large bears stepped out, and came slowly toward them.

"Oh! oh! one will eat *you* up, and one will eat *me!*" said poor little Prue, in a horrified whisper.

"No, I shall look one of them straight in the eye," said Janet, firmly; "and you do the same to the other. Then they won't dare to touch us. I read that in a book."

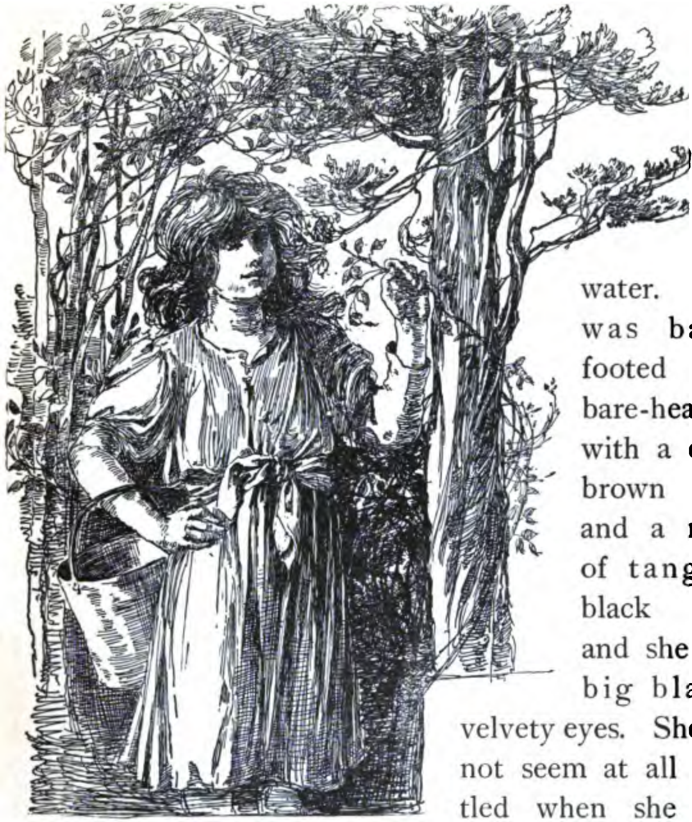
"Our rings! our rings!" exclaimed Prue, suddenly remembering, while she tried to stare fiercely at the left-hand bear, what she had in her pocket.

In an instant, both the Kanter girls slipped their rings on their fingers, and when the bears came trotting leisurely up, there were no little girls to be seen anywhere. The two great brown creatures took a drink from the spring, and then went their way through the alder bushes. A few minutes after the Kanter girls re-appeared, looking rather pale, but on the whole quite pleased with such an adventure.

"I wouldn't be afraid of the biggest tiger, now!" said Janet, bravely.

"Or rattlesnakes," said Prue, not to be outdone.

But now another sight met their eyes. A little girl came springing out of the deeper part of the woods, with an old tin pail, evidently in search of



water. She was bare-footed and bare-headed, with a clear brown skin and a mass of tangled black hair, and she had big black, velvety eyes. She did not seem at all startled when she saw the Kanter girls, but smiled at them, showing two rows of pearly-white teeth.

"What is your name?" asked Janet, smiling in return.

"Pepita," said the child.

"Where do you live?" asked Prue.

"Over in the woods there. Come and see!" replied the child, invitingly.

"Let's go," said Janet, who was always fond of visiting.

So the Kanter girls followed their little guide, who with a light foot skilfully led the way, now through underbrush, now over rocks, now through a valley, going farther and farther into the woods, till at last she brought them out on a grassy knoll which had been partly cleared, and where there were blue chiccory flowers in bloom around the stumps. There they saw a weather-beaten tent with some women and babies inside, and near by was a shabby covered wagon, and an old horse nibbling grass and sorrel. Two men lay on the ground, seemingly asleep, and a woman more repulsive than the rest was stirring something in an iron pot over a smouldering fire. Into this group Pepita sprang, laughing, and set down her pail of water.

"Who may you be, my pretty ladies?" asked the old woman at the fire, with a smile which did not at all fit her face.

"We met your little girl in the woods, and we

have come to play with her," said Janet, as politely as she could.

"She invited us to come," said Prue, fearing they might be thought intrusive.

"That was right, my dearies!" said the woman, with another odd smile. "Pepita, my darling daughter, bid the little ladies to sit down here on the grass. Tell them we are gipsies, and we don't let our company wear shoes and stockings, for fear they will act proud."

There was a loud laugh from the women in the tent, and by this time the Kanter girls heartily wished themselves at home; but not wishing to offend, they made no resistance, when naughty Pepita, with a mischievous glance, untied their shoes, pulled them off, and next took their stockings.

"I want those bonnets for my babies," said a young woman, coming out of the tent, and she roughly took the clean, white sunbonnets from the Kanter girls' heads.

They were now thoroughly frightened, but the thought of their rings gave them courage. Janet suddenly vanished from sight, for she had put hers on and was safe. Pepita stared in amazement, and the women, missing one of their victims, ran hither

and thither, pushing aside the bushes and looking in every direction.

"Mother! mother!" screamed the gypsy girl, "the shoes and stockings are melting out of my hands. That was a witch, and she has gone into the air!"



In fact, the first thing Janet did when she became invisible was to snatch her shoes and stockings, and put them on, when of course they became invisible too, and then she ran to the tent to get her sunbonnet.

But all this time poor Prue was searching and fumbling in her pocket in vain, she could not find her ring, and terrible indeed was her situation without it. The gypsies now cast dark, threatening glances at her, and she gave herself up for lost.

Suddenly she heard a soft little whisper in her ear.

"Why don't you put on your ring quick, Prue?"

"Oh, I can't, it's lost! I must have lost it by the spring," said Prue, in a low voice, knowing it was Janet by her side.

"What are you muttering there?" asked one of the women, fiercely.

But Janet had heard enough. Safe in her invisibility, she hurried from the knoll, retracing the way by which they had come, and after some anxious moments reached the spring, where she hunted all about in the grass and moss for the precious ring. Oh, what if she could not find it!

Just then a bird flew over her head, singing.

"How much that looks like our bluebird," she thought, and then it seemed to her that the bird sang,

"*Under the fern leaf! under the fern leaf!*"

There was a fern leaf growing at her feet, and she peeped under it at once. There, to her great joy, was indeed the ring! She caught it up, and hastened as fast as possible back to the gypsy band.

Poor Prue was crying bitterly, with Pepita dancing mockingly about her, when suddenly she felt the ring slipped upon her finger, and whiff! She went out of sight as quick as one can blow out a

candle. Pepita stopped short in her dancing, and her face grew blank as she saw the second pair of shoes and stockings melt into nothingness.

"They were witches! They were witches!" cried the gypsies, who were even more frightened than the Kanter girls had been, and they made ready to leave the woods that very night, for fear of some evil befalling them.

The Kanter girls could laugh now at their discomfiture, as they slipped away unseen through the woods, and came back to the old path which little black-eyed Pepita had tempted them to leave. Here they again put their rings into their pockets, and looked at each other with a satisfied smile.

"We got through *that* adventure well, didn't we?" said Janet.

"Yes, but I never want to visit gypsies again!" replied Prue.

They now ran along the forest-path without meeting any further mishaps, and presently came out on the edge of the fields, not more than ten rods from their father's cottage. There was a boy crossing the field a little ahead of them.

"That's Ned Wray," said Prue.

"I'm glad," said Janet, "I have something for

him. But first let's put on our rings, and slip some daisies into his hand, just for fun."

A moment after, Ned Wray, who was walking quietly along with a very sober face, suddenly felt something in his hands, and looking down, found them filled with flowers.

"Did they rain out of the sky!" he exclaimed, looking up at the daisy-white clouds overhead.

A merry laugh drew his eyes down again, and there were the Kanter girls right in front of him, their faces all aglow with fun.

"Did you spring up out of the ground?" he asked, gayly, looking very glad to see them.

"Yes, we grew and blossomed!" said Janet. "What made you look so sober a minute ago, Ned? Have you lost anything?"

"Yes, I have," he replied, "that four-bladed knife father gave me. Somebody must have stolen it, for I left it on our fence just for a minute while I went into the house to get an apple."

"I *knew* it was yours!" said Janet, triumphantly, producing the knife from her pocket and giving it to him. "Those gypsies stole it, I found it in their tent."

"Have you been to the gypsy tent?" Ned asked, in amazement.

"Yes, we went to play with Pepita!" answered Prue; and then the Kanter girls ran off homeward, laughing, for they did not want to answer any more questions.



The Stream that ran both Ways—

III

"I've heard of nests of cinnamon
Where the great phœnix sat thereon,
But of *your* nests I never heard.
What kind are they, pray tell me, bird?"
—*Mary Howitt.*

"And clear the flood of silver swung
Between the brimming edges,
And now the depths were dark and now
The boat slid o'er the sedges."
—*Harriet Prescott Spofford.*

ONE warm day, when the Kanter girls had been kept very busy, going to school in the morning, and helping about the house in the afternoon, they had an hour all to themselves just before supper, and they sat down on the doorstep to rest and to talk. At one end of the step grew a flowering almond, and at the other end a cinnamon rose, while not very far off was the apple-tree where at that moment the wonderful bluebird was hovering over her nest.

"I am so warm," said Prue, "I wish I could jump into the river."

"There isn't any river here," said Janet. "I wish

there was, don't you? or a pond, or even a little tiny brook."

"I should want it to be big enough to wade in and to sail little ships in," replied Prue, "And, oh! yes! I should want it to be big enough for us to get into a boat and go sailing ourselves!"

"Oh, yes! and have oars," added Janet.

"*Peep into my nest! Peep into my nest!*" sang the great, blue, beautiful bird in the apple-tree.

The Kanter girls ran to the tree at once, and did as before, one holding the other up in her arms to reach the nest. It was Prue who peeped in, and she exclaimed, "Oh! there are two more eggs here!"

"*Take them up, and take them down!*" sang the bird.

So Prue took the eggs, and slipping down to the ground, went with Janet back to the doorstep and looked at them. They were small and round, and of a greenish-blue, the color of the sea.

"*Break them!*" sang the bird.

"Oh, I don't dare!" said Prue, taking one of the eggs in her fingers gently. But at that very instant there was a faint *tap*, *tap*, *tap* inside, as if something was in prison.

"It may be a dear baby-bird," said Prue, giving a

little knock at the end of the shell, which broke instantly and something leaped out on the step and away into the grass.

"It was only a grasshopper," said Janet, "and we've seen the last of *him*. He jumped so quick that he carried the egg-shell off with him!"

"*Was* it a grasshopper?" asked Prue. "I thought he looked like a funny little green man."

"Let me break the other egg," said Janet.

She gave it a clever crack in the middle, and one half flew off, leaving the other half in her hand. There was nothing in it but a little water.

"*Set it in the rocks!*" sang the bluebird, who was now mounting into the sky. There were some old gray rocks lying in a heap at the foot of the hill, as if some giant had hurled them there for sport, and to these rocks the Kanter girls went, carrying the shell very carefully, that not a drop might be spilled.

"Here's a little hollow place where we can set it," said Prue, after looking around.

"It holds it just like an egg-cup, don't it?" said Janet, setting the shell in very gently, so as not to break it.

Then, oh! wonder of wonders! hardly had she removed her hand when the drops of water began to bubble and overflow, running so fast down the rock

and down the green slope, that in five minutes there was quite a stream flowing right in front of the cottage garden, and running on and on through the meadows and farms below, farther than the eye could reach.

"Oh! it is our own stream! our own beautiful stream!" cried the Kanter girls, and they hastened to call their mother to see it. She was very much pleased when she found what had happened.

"Now we shall never suffer from drouth," she said, "and it will be a good place to rinse the clothes."

"Oh! oh! oh! our beautiful stream!" shouted the little girls again and again, full of joy.

Suddenly Prue spied the other half of the egg-shell which had dropped on the grass, and she picked it up.

"I'm going to sail it," she said, laughing, "and see how far it will go!"

She laid it on the stream, where it not only floated extremely well, but also began to spread and grow until, almost before they knew it, it had changed into a little boat, white inside, and of a delicate greenish-blue outside. Janet could reach it with her hand, and she drew it to the bank.

"Let's get right in and have a sail," she cried;

and in another moment she and Prue were seated on its two little benches, and were floating easily down the stream.

"Now we have passed our garden and our pasture," they said as they moved on, letting their hands reach over into the water, so the cooling ripples could plash against them.

"And now we are going by Ned Wray's father's farm, and next comes the Greens' farm, and then we shall reach those long grassy meadows where the boys get sweet-flag!"

The two children sat contentedly in the boat, watching the changing banks as the pretty stream carried them along. There was a peculiar sparkle, and a great deal of rippling in the water, almost as if it enjoyed the frolic itself. The cattle in the pastures came down to the stream to drink, and in some places there were cat-tails growing on the banks. But the sun was now getting low, and as they floated on through the sweet-flag meadows, which they had reached at last, Prue said,

"Let's go home now. I don't want to be out in the dark."

"Very well," said Janet, taking up two small oars which lay in the bottom of the boat; "we shall have to row back, you know, because it's up stream."

But, ah! that was easier said than done. They had no idea how to handle oars, to begin with, and if they had, they never could have rowed with their little strength against *that* stream which was now hurrying them on resistlessly.

All at once they heard a voice calling wildly to them from the bank.

"*Do* stop! Oh, pray do, *do* stop!"

The Kanter girls could not see any person at all, but Janet called back.

"We can't stop! The stream takes us right along."

"Run against that point, then!" replied the voice, in the most pleading accents.

There was a little point of land ahead, and by a desperate pushing with one oar Janet made out to run the boat against it, when it instantly stopped as if glad to rest.

"I'm here!" cried the voice from among the rushes, "and, oh! I've got *such* a thorn in my foot running all the way after you."

By this time they could see the speaker, and he was the drollest little man anyone ever saw, only about twelve inches high, all dressed in green, and with a queer little cap on his head that looked for all the world like an egg-shell. He was almost crying,

and they were afraid his feelings must be very much hurt indeed.

"*Why* did you come off before you learned the word?" he asked, reproachfully; "I was just eating my supper and didn't know you had started."



"What word?" asked Janet, with great curiosity.

"Let me get in before I tell you!" said the little green man, and with that he cleared the bank at a bound, and alighted in the bow of the boat.

"Now I *know* you are a grasshopper," exclaimed Janet, "or you couldn't jump so. But how you have grown!"

"A grasshopper, indeed!" he replied, petulantly. "I could have jumped ten times as far if it had not been for the thorn!"

"What *is* the word, sir?" asked Prue, with some anxiety, for the sun was dipping down behind the fields and it would soon be dark.

"*Turn, stream, turn!*" he said, and even as he uttered the words, the ripples all seemed to turn somersaults, and there was a rush and swash of the water against the bank, and there they were floating home again as easily as possible, for the stream was running just the other way.

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Janet. "Now it is all as easy as can be, and we may sail as far as we like."

"Only don't forget the word," said the little green man, with a grimace.

"What makes you care so much?" asked Prue.

"Why, I can't swim!" he exclaimed, "And suppose you got out into the Gulf Stream, you would have to go all the way round the globe to get back. And *then* you wouldn't come to the right place!"

Prue knew this would be very dreadful. Besides, there might be storms and water-spouts out on the ocean, and she made up her mind never, never to forget the word.

By this time they had floated back, past the Greens' farm and the Wrays' farm, and were coming alongside the bank at the very edge of their mother's flower-garden. There stood their mother herself in the open cottage-door, calling them to come to supper.

So they sprang ashore, said good-by to the odd little boatman, and ran into the house. Never did hot waffles with cream taste so good to two little girls before. They went to sleep that night listening to the pleasant sound of rippling water, with their minds made up to take another sail the first thing when day came.



IV

"A plaything of the restless wave,
The boat on ocean tossed."

—*Whittier.*

"And beside the silver runnel, on a little heap of sand,
I saw the green gnome sitting with his cheek upon his hand."

—*Robert Buchanan.*

THEIR mother made no objection in the morning when she found what they wished to do, but after they had helped her with her work, she put up a nice lunch for them, tied their sunbonnets, and let them start.

The little light boat lay close to the bank, and after they had stepped carefully in, it floated gently with the stream. As they passed Mr. Wray's farm they saw Ned leading his father's horse down to drink. They nodded and smiled at him, and he stood watching them as they went by.

"He must feel surprised," said Janet, complacently.

And now they floated through the low green meadows again, but this time without alarm, for they had the day before them, and they wanted to see where their stream went. The sun shone bright and warm, the birds were singing overhead, the little fish were swimming and leaping in the water, and the Kanter girls were as happy as they could be.

After the meadows came a thick wood, where alders grew down close to the banks and shaded the water. In one place two or three black bears came to the very edge and growled, but the children were not afraid, for the good little stream swept them bravely and merrily by. Then there were more farms, with orchards and sloping fields, but the children could not tell whose they were, for they had never been so far before. Then came a little straggling village, and there were boys down at the bank sailing chips.

The stream went faster now, there were more farms, more forests, more villages, but the Kanter girls did not grow tired, it was all new and wonderful to them. By and by, the banks, instead of being green and mossy, became sandy,

with rocks here and there, and suddenly Janet exclaimed :

" Why, our stream is a river! See how wide it has grown ! And, oh ! Prue, Prue, *what* is all that dazzling blue space ahead that does not look like sky ? "

" It must be the sea ! " said Prue, rapturously. All her life long she had wanted to behold the sea.

Their stream, which was a river now, swept them rapidly and resistlessly along. They passed islands with lighthouses, they passed ships with white sails, till finally they seemed to pass everything, and to be alone with the sea and sky.

" Now we have gone far enough," said Janet; " let's eat our lunch and go back."

So while Prue uncovered the basket, Janet called out,

" Go back, stream, go back ! "

But nothing happened, the face of the waters did not change at all, and the boat still bounded on.

" Perhaps I ought to say *river*," thought Janet, so she called out again,

" Go back, river, go back ! "

Still nothing happened, and the boat bounded on. Janet began to feel frightened, and Prue looked up wondering.



"GO BACK, STREAM!" CRIED PRUE AGAIN.

"Go back, sea, go back!" cried Janet, in despair; but still nothing happened, except that the boat bounded on, and the two little Kanter girls, overcome by the unexpected result, sat down in the bottom of the boat and cried.

"Now we shall go away around the globe," sobbed Prue, "and never get back to the right place again. If we ever get anywhere, it will be somebody else's cottage and somebody else's mother!"

"*I'm* afraid of sinking and drowning," wailed Janet, "and I am so thirsty I don't know what to do."

"Go back, stream!" cried Prue again. "Go back, dear, darling stream, and take us home again!"

But still they went on and on, and now the sea, the sky, and even the sun looked different.

"We must have gone thousands of miles," sighed Prue. "Look, there is an island, Janet; see the funny tall trees with bunches of big leaves up at the top."

"They are like the pictures in our geography," said Janet, with a little reviving interest. "And, oh, see! There is an elephant walking along! I wonder if we can get ashore!"

"I should be afraid to," said Prue, cautiously. "If

it is a tropical country, there will be snakes and crocodiles."

"Oh! oh! See the monkeys!" cried Janet.

The Kanter girls had now floated quite near land, and more than fifty monkeys were running out of the woods down on the shore to look at them, grinning and chattering in great excitement. Some of the little monkeys climbed on the backs of the bigger ones in order to see better, and one monkey, who had stubbed his toe running, sat down and held it with a very woe-begone face.

Janet and Prue could not help laughing, although their minds were so disturbed about getting home, but all the while they were floating on, till presently they had passed the island, and the sense of desolateness smote upon them afresh. Besides, some great black clouds had come up over the sky, and the wind began to blow in a gale. The Kanter girls cowered before it, with the tears rolling down their cheeks, and still the boat bounded on over the waves.

"It will be night before long," moaned Prue. "Oh, please, *please* turn, stream, turn!"

This time she had hit upon the right words, and the instant she spoke, the billows all reared themselves in just the reverse direction, the wind changed, and there they were floating rapidly back toward the point

from which they had come. The little Kanter girls could hardly believe in such good fortune at first, and sat holding each other's hands in silence. But when they passed the island again where the elephant wandered among the palm-trees, and found their boat still bounding on the homeward way, their hearts grew light as ever with the elasticity of childhood, and they laughed and talked while they ate their lunch.

Back and back over the sea they sailed, repassing the ships and the lonely lighthouses, and it did not seem so very long before they were again upon the river, whose current now flowed merrily just the other way, bearing them toward home. Past the villages and farms and forests they went, and would have reached the cottage garden without once stopping, if they had not happened to see, sitting on a rock which jutted out into the stream, the forlorn figure of their little boatman friend, with his head on his knees, weeping.

He looked up at them as they floated near, and said, in a heart-broken voice,

"I *told* you I couldn't swim!"

"Oh, well, we got along very well without you," said Janet, cheerfully. "We were only a little frightened, that's all. Don't you want to get into the boat?"

"Of course I do," he replied, with a splendid leap

from the rock which took him at once to the bow of the boat.

"Do you want to go with us every time we sail?" asked Prue, not quite sure that she should like such odd company as a steady thing, but thinking perhaps it might be "the rule," as they say in school, to have him go with them.

"Oh, no, no!" he answered, "that would be very inconvenient, I have so many things to do. To-day, for instance, I meant to have put up a large quantity of pickles. But it is my business to see that you have the word. I *do* hope you won't forget it again," he added, pathetically.

"Oh, never fear, we won't forget," said Janet, and as the boat grazed against the garden bank, she sprang out with her sister, and they found themselves back in the cottage just in time to tell the whole story of their adventures to their mother while the three pared apples for pies.

Many a sail after that did the Kanter girls take in their pretty little boat, sometimes only to the meadows, sometimes as far out as the lighthouses, but they never again forgot to say, "Turn, stream, turn," and their acquaintance with the odd little green man would have quite stopped short, if something had not happened.



The Unexpected Happens

V

"Alas! my journey rugged and
uneven
Through prickly moors or dusty
ways must wind."
— *Wordsworth.*

"Then, as I don't like all the trouble I've had,
In future I'll try to prevent it;
For I never am naughty without being sad,
Or good—without being contented."
—*Jane Taylor.*

ONE day Janet was naughty! Her mother had so much sewing to do on that day that, in the morning, she bade Janet and Prue wash and wipe all the dishes and put the rooms in order entirely by themselves. They had never had so long a task set them before, though they had helped so often that they knew just how each thing ought to be done. But they had planned something entirely different for that morning, and Janet's face was dark and gloomy as she cleared the table.

"Let's run away!" she whispered to Prue.

"Oh, no!" said Prue; "maybe we can finish by noon, and mother says we may bake cakes."

"I don't want cakes," said Janet, peevishly. And in a few minutes she *did* run away. When



no one was looking, she slipped out at the door, past the poppies and asters, down to the stream,

and getting quickly into the little boat, floated away alone.

She tried to believe she was going to have a very delightful time, all by herself and free as the air, but it was hard to drive from her mind the vision of patient little Prue doing all the dishes alone, and after that the sweeping and dusting. Somehow it seemed to her as if the very stream understood it all, and as if the cat-tails on the bank whispered to the rushes that here was the little girl who had run away from helping her mother.

"But I *ought* to be out of doors," said Janet, "fresh air is good for people."

She almost expected Prue to answer her when she spoke, she was so used to having her sister at her side all the time; but to-day there was no answer, unless—could it really be?—the waves rippling by the boat's side seemed to plash and bubble "Selfish Janet! Selfish Janet!"

"I don't think I will go very far to-day," said Janet to herself, as the little boat floated down through the meadows after passing the two farms, which now lay between her and home. There was a pear-tree growing in the meadows a short distance from the water's edge, and pears could be seen, which looked most temptingly ripe, on the lower branches.

"I'll just step ashore a minute, and gather some to take to mother and Prue," thought Janet, "and then I will go right home."

She steered the boat against the bank, and springing out, ran to the tree, where she soon gathered her apron full of delicious pears. But when she turned toward the stream again, expecting to sail home at once, what was her dismay and terror to see the boat almost out of sight, floating down the stream, and the next moment disappearing.

"Oh! I have lost it!" she cried. "Who knows but it is gone forever! Oh! it is all my fault, my pretty, pretty boat! Now I must walk all the way home, and how tiresome that will be!"

She started on foot through the deep grass and reeds of the meadow, where the ground was so uncertain that in five minutes her shoes were wet through and covered with mud, and yet she was not half-way over it. She pushed on with many a stumble, and at last, feeling utterly forlorn, reached the wall beyond which lay Mr. Green's farm, where there was different ground. It was no longer wet and marshy, but it was so full of stones and stubble that it hurt her feet every step she took.

She was now so tired and faint that she ate two or three of the pears to refresh herself, but the

stones had cut her shoes, and her knees were bruised with the falls she had had, so by the time she reached the next field she was wholly exhausted.

"Oh! how naughty I have been!" she said, sobbing, "and this is my punishment! I wish I was with Prue, setting away the cups and saucers in mother's cool pantry! But now I have lost our beautiful boat, and I am too tired to go another step. Oh! I am so very, *very* sorry I ran away!"

She was sitting on the low wall as she said this, and as she swung one of her aching feet for a little relief, it chanced now and then to hit the nearest stone.

"I'm coming! Here I am!" said a plaintive, cracked voice; "why *didn't* you call me before? I was just digging in my garden when you rapped." And out from behind the stone popped the figure of the little green man.

"I *didn't* rap!" said Janet; "I only hit my foot."

"You must not play jokes on *me!*" exclaimed the little man, reproachfully. "But if you don't need me, I will go back to my garden,"

"Oh! don't go," cried Janet, eagerly, "I want somebody to talk to. And I *should* need your help

if there was anything you could do, but there isn't. I have lost the boat; it is gone forever; it is out on the ocean by this time, and I must walk all the way home over these rough fields."

"How did it happen?" asked the little man, fixing his keen gaze upon her.

"I was very naughty," confessed Janet, "I ran away and left my sister to do all the work alone."

"Oh! I know all about that," he interrupted. "But she had help, my wife stepped in and helped her. How did you lose the boat, that's what I want to know?"

"I just went ashore a minute to get these pears," she said, showing him what was in her apron, "and I never thought to tie the boat, and now it is lost forever!"

"I knew it! I knew it!" he exclaimed. "You've forgotten the word again, and here I've had to leave all my work!"

"I am very sorry, I am sure," said Janet, sadly; "but you see I was on the land, so the word wouldn't be of any use. I haven't forgotten it at all, it is 'Turn, stream, turn!'"

"You had better have said it an hour ago," he replied, shading his eyes with his hand as he looked intently down the river.

"Why, the river *has* turned!" exclaimed Janet, joyfully, and now she too shaded her eyes and looked.

"I see it!" said the little green man at last, pointing at something that seemed like the merest speck, but which, as it swiftly floated nearer, the little Kanter girl herself soon saw to be her missing boat.

She ran gladly to the bank, the boat came up of itself and stopped for her, and she leaped in, followed by her odd companion. What happiness it was to find herself sailing rapidly and safely home.

"Good-by," said the little man when the garden bank was reached, and Janet stepped out; "good-by, and remember, when you want me again, to rap three times on the nearest stone."

"Good-by, I'll remember," said Janet, wondering, as she walked up the path between rows of pinks, what sort of a house his could be, and whether every stone one might happen to stop at were a door.

When she went into the cottage, expecting to be met with well-deserved reproaches, there sat Prue by her mother's side, as smiling as a May morning, in a clean apron, and all the work looking as if it had been done for hours. Janet, worn and torn

and dirty, told all the story of her woes and how sorry she was, and it seemed to her that nothing in the whole day had been so sweet as her mother's and Prue's forgiving kisses. She gave them the pears, which were now sadly bruised and not good for much, but which at least showed that she had tried to do one little kind act.

"How did you get everything done so quickly and so nicely?" she asked, as she looked around.

"Why, it was very odd," said Prue, laughing. "Just after we missed you, the nicest little old woman came skipping in. She took the broom, and you ought to have seen how she brushed out all the corners. She wore a green dress, and her eyes were like little bright beads. She dusted and set everything to rights, and when the dishes were put away all was done. Then she and I baked cakes, and after that she went away. I have had a *beautiful* time!"



VI

"Do not leave the sky out of your landscape."
—*Emerson.*

"Forward and back, and it's just as far,
Out and in, and it's just as straight."
—*Ibsen.*

AGAIN the two Kanter girls sat on the door-step, talking of things they had done, and of things they might some time do. They were stringing purple larkspurs, and each had a necklace almost done. Every now and then they measured them to see which was the longer, but without stopping their happy child-like talk.

"I wonder what kind of flowers grow in England," said Janet, "and whether girls string them."

"I wonder what kind grow in China. They must be different from ours, I know," said Prue. "Don't you wish we could go to other countries and see what gardens there are, and what the people are doing?"

"Yes," said Janet, "I wish we had a golden chariot that would fly through the air and take us everywhere we want to go!"

"Yes, and birds to draw it," added Prue; and the idea was such a pleasant one, that they let their fancies run on as they would, thinking what wonderful journeys they might take.

Suddenly they heard the sweet, clear note of the bluebird overhead in the apple-tree.

"*Peep into my nest!*" she sang, "*and what you see, take!*"

Up jumped the Kanter girls, and on reaching the nest they found in it two eggs, of a greenish-gold color, which they at once secured and carried back to their seat on the door-step.

"*Break them! Break them!*" sang the bird.

So they broke the first, and in it lay, oh, wonder! a tiny golden chariot which grew bigger so fast that they had to set it down in the grass as quick as they could, and in one minute and a quarter it was of a size to hold them both on its one seat, which was cushioned with gold-colored silk. It did not have wheels, but there were little wings at its corners.

They broke the second egg, against whose shell they had already heard several impatient taps, and out flew two tiny birds with feathers of glittering

green. In two seconds they were as large as pigeons, in two more as large as hens, and in two more as large as swans, which size they retained. They immediately placed themselves before the golden chariot, to which they were attached by a light golden harness, and now everything was ready for the Kanter girls to take a ride.

"We've time enough," said Janet, "it's not anywhere near noon yet. Get in quick, Prue!"

They sprang in and seated themselves side by side. The birds rose with them into the air, quite above the chimney and the apple-tree, and then paused as if to await orders.

"Shall we visit a tea-garden, or a Spanish, or an English garden?" asked Janet.

"I don't know," said Prue, "let's go to the biggest, most beautiful garden in all the world. Maybe some king or queen has one more beautiful and wonderful than any other, that we have never heard about. We do not know what country to find it in, but the birds will know."

"That's just it," said Janet. "Fly, birds, and take us to the biggest, most beautiful, most wonderful garden in all the world!"

The great birds spread their pinions afresh, and the little wings on the chariot fluttered, speeding

through the air. The Kanter girls, as they looked down, could see that they were passing rapidly over mountains and plains and rivers, over towns and cities, and over the great ocean itself.

"That is a pretty island right under us now," said Janet; "let us visit it some day."

"I see a volcano away over yonder," said Prue; "I don't ever want to visit that!"

On and on they flew, till, as near as the Kanter girls could tell, they must have gone about eight thousand miles, when suddenly the birds slackened their speed and then paused. Directly underneath lay a most lovely garden, with flower-beds all in bloom, and fountains playing. There were fruit-trees full of fruit, and a velvety lawn where pretty little spotted deer were nibbling grass. There were arbors and greenhouses, graperies and shrubberies, and in the midst stood a castle built of red and green blocks of marble.

"This *is* surely the most beautiful garden in the world!" cried Janet; "fly down, birds, and take us into it at once!"

The birds, in a hesitating manner, began slowly to flutter downward, but before they reached the ground a golden-haired little girl ran out from one of the arbors and exclaimed,



"SPEEDING THROUGH THE AIR."

"No, no! go back! You never must come in that way! It's forbidden. You must only come in by the gate."

"We didn't know that," said Janet, pleasantly. "Fly, birds, and take us to the garden gate."

The birds flew, and as the girls looked down they saw that they were passing over innumerable gravel paths and green hedges, with here and there a house. Suddenly the birds descended to the ground, and there they were directly in front of the garden gate, which was arched, and had upon it, in red letters, these words:

"THE MAZE."

"Now we can go in!" said Janet, joyfully. "Good-by, birds, we'll call you when we are ready to go home."

The birds seemed to understand, for they flew to some tree-tops near by, and the Kanter girls, hand in hand, passed through the arched gateway, and took the first path they came to, which, as it chanced, led to the left. On either side of them was a carefully trimmed arbor-vitæ hedge, higher than their heads, so that they could not look over it, even if they stood on tiptoe. But the path was a pleasant one to walk in, and they stepped along in

high spirits, thinking this was the finest adventure they had ever had. Presently, Prue said,

"See, there is another path turning off from this just ahead. Shall we take that?"

They stopped and looked down it, as they reached it, but decided to keep to the one they were already in, and walked on. In a few minutes the path made an abrupt turn, which they followed, and almost immediately found themselves staring at the arbor-vitæ hedge directly in front of them. The path had come to a complete stop, and the only way to take another step was to turn around and go back.

"How provoking!" said Janet; "I hear birds singing over the other side of that hedge!"

"So do I," said Prue. "Let's run back and take that other path we saw, and maybe we shall get there."

It was the only thing to be done, so they went back, half laughing at the mistake they had made, and in a few moments they turned into the other path, and walked gayly on. The path wound this way and that, and every little while a bird flew overhead, singing.

"I think we shall reach the flower-garden pretty soon now," said Prue, hopefully, for they had gone

quite a distance; but hardly had she spoken when a new bewilderment arose. The path, in which they were walking, divided into three paths, each leading in a different direction, and each equally attractive. Fortunately, there was a pretty little arbor just at this point where they could rest a while and consider.

"There ought to be a guide-post," said Janet.

"Or a mile-stone," said Prue, "only perhaps we haven't gone a mile yet."

They looked doubtfully down each path, and finally concluded to take the right-hand one. It was so pleasant strolling between the high, green hedges, with the blue sky above them, that they did not at all lose courage yet, and besides, any moment might bring them into the heart of the garden, where the lovely flower-beds were; so they walked lightly on. The path, as they followed it, made seven turns, and then all at once they found themselves entering a small enclosure, where a little old woman sat knitting on a bench, before a gray cottage. She looked at them with an appearance of great delight.

"Good-morning, dears!" she cried. "I'm so glad to see you. Most of the people go another way, and it is very lonesome here."

"Then we have made another mistake," whispered Prue to her sister; "but as she seems so very glad to see us, I suppose we ought to stay a few minutes."

"Can you tell us the way to the garden?" asked Janet, politely; but the old woman shook her head.

"I never leave home," she said, "and you had better stay here with me. If you wander about, you will be lost. *Do* stay!"

"Do you live here all alone?" asked Janet.

"Yes," sighed the dame, "I am placed here to take care of the herb-garden and knit. There is my herb-garden in the corner."

The Kanter girls went at once to look at it. It was really a very snug little garden, with rue and mint, thyme and sweet-basil, and many other herbs green and flourishing. There was lavender in bloom, and saffron, and pot-marigold full of yellow flowers.

"Pick some fennel," said the old woman, "it is good to keep folks awake in meeting."

"But you never go to meeting, do you?" asked Prue, trying to remember whether she had seen a spire anywhere in the garden.

"No, I don't know the way But I always keep fennel growing."



"GOOD-MORNING, DEARS!"

"It tastes good," said Janet, nibbling at a stem; "it tastes something like caraway."

"Oh, I can give you caraway," said the old woman, getting up. "You won't mind taking it in cookies, I hope."

She hobbled into her cottage, and brought out a pewter plate heaped with nice brown cookies. The Kanter girls' eyes brightened, for they were very hungry, and caraway-seeds could not have presented themselves in a more delightful form. The old woman was pleased to see them eat, and, bidding them take all they wanted, she sat down on her bench and began to knit again. But after they had eaten five apiece, they were a little ashamed to take any more, and besides they wanted to be hastening on their way to the garden. So they smoothed down their aprons, and tied their bonnets afresh.

"Don't go yet!" pleaded the old woman. "Stay here with me all summer."

"Oh, no, we must go now," said Janet. "Thank you for the cookies. It is very pleasant here, but we want to reach the garden. Good-by!"

"Good-by," said Prue also, looking back a little wistfully at the old woman, who seemed ready to cry. "If I could find a kitten anywhere, I would bring it to you for company."

Then she and Janet ran swiftly away, along the path with its seven turns, back to the little arbor where they had paused before.

"We will take the left-hand path this time," said Janet.

"If we could only see over the top of these high, green hedges," said Prue, "we could get along very much better."

But that was out of the question, so, with tolerable cheerfulness, they took the left-hand path, and walked along in it for about five minutes, when they turned a sharp corner, and found their way stopped short by a pair of bars.

"There, now! we shall have to go back again. How provoking!" exclaimed Janet.

"Let's look over the bars first," said Prue, "and see what there is on the other side!"

So they looked over, and beheld a little enclosed field where there were a number of snow-white sheep and lambs cropping clover. Two or three of the pretty creatures seemed to know that someone was near, for they raised their heads and appeared to be listening.

"Lambie! lambie!" called Prue, softly, and at the sound of her voice two lambs came trotting toward the bars. The Kanter girls put their hands through,

and patted the white, woolly heads; but the next moment they were startled by the sightof a rough, awkward shepherd-boy, who ran across the field toward them, shaking his crook in a threatening manner.

"Go away!" he shouted. "Don't touch those lambs; I'm here to guard them, and you had better go away."

"We don't want to hurt them!" said Janet, indignantly; "we didn't know there were sheep here. We are trying to find the flower-garden."

"Oho!" he exclaimed, "that's what they all say. But I keep a dog. Towser, Towser! here, sir! At 'em, Towser!"

At this a great dog sprang forward and looked over the bars. The little Kanter girls shrank back in a corner, as close to the green hedge as they could get. Suddenly Prue bethought herself, and said, "Rings, Janet!" In another instant they had slipped their invisible rings upon their fingers, and disappeared from sight. The rude boy stared and rubbed his eyes, the dog drooped his tail between his legs, while the Kanter girls hastened down the path the way they had come, and did not take off their rings again until they reached the little restful arbor, where they now sat down for the third time to take breath.



VII

" Till so far through that green place she had won
That she a rose-hedged garden could behold."
—William Morris.

THERE was nothing now to be done but to take the middle path, so after Janet and Prue had rested a while, they started again, feeling sure that they were right *this* time. Here and there a red rose bloomed in the hedge, which made it seem more garden-like, Janet said, and altogether they felt quite encouraged. But they soon found it a very bewildering path after all, so many new paths continually branched off from it on the right side and on the left, and sometimes there were so many paths at once that the Kanter girls could not tell whether they were keeping in the same one,

or changing again and again. But they did as well as they could, and kept right on, sometimes walking and sometimes running, while every now and then a red rose appeared in the hedge, and the birds sang louder than ever.

"Where *are* those birds?" exclaimed Janet, stopping suddenly. "Prue, I do believe the garden is just the other side of this hedge. Only smell, and see how sweet the air is, as if there were millions and millions of flowers close by. Oh! if we could only climb over!"

But this was impossible, for the hedge seemed higher than ever, and it grew so very thick there was no way of pushing or even peeping through.

"Let's run on, and maybe we shall come to the entrance in a minute," said Prue.

So they ran on full of hope, but, alas! the path made a turn in another direction which took them quite away, and they could not smell the flowers any more, nor hear the birds.

"Isn't this dis—" began Janet, but she never finished the sentence, for they suddenly found themselves walking into a small square yard, in the corner of which stood a red cottage, and on the doorstep sat a little girl sewing piece-work. On the other side of the yard was a row of bee-hives.

The little girl saw the Kanter children and smiled at them. She was a very nice little girl, with brown hair braided in two long braids, and she had brown eyes and red cheeks. She wore a brown and white apron, so clean that it did one good to look at it.

"Come and sit down," she said, pleasantly. "Aren't you tired?"

"A little," admitted Janet. "Do you live here?"

"Yes," said the little girl, "I am put here to watch the bees."

The Kanter girls glanced rather timidly toward the hives. Some of the bees were crawling in and out, and some were flying in the air, and there was a great sound of humming and buzzing.

"They might swarm, you know," continued the little girl. "That apple-tree over the hives is on purpose for them to swarm in. And I keep red and white clover growing in the yard, so the bees that don't want to fly far can find honey near home. But many of them go to the great garden."

"That's just where we want to go," said Janet. "We thought we were almost there, but we have made a mistake again, and I suppose we shall have to go back."

"Oh, no, you haven't made a mistake," replied the little girl; "the way to the garden is right

through our yard. See, over the other side is where you go out. People always have to go through our yard."

"Oh! how glad I am!" cried Janet. "What a dear little girl you are! What is your name?"

"They call me the bee-girl, but my name is really Polly," she said. "Don't you think my piece-work is pretty? Only I wish I had some pink to put in it."

"I have some pink at home," said Prue; "I would give it to you if I had it here. Don't you ever feel lonesome?"

"Oh! no," laughed the bee-girl, "I like this yard better than any place in the world. I have never even wanted to go to the great garden, I like this place so much, here with my bees."

Janet thought this extremely strange.

"*We* want to go to the garden," she said, "we have been trying for a long time to get there. I am afraid we shall lose our way again after we leave here. Of course *you* can't tell us how to go, as you have never been there yourself."

"I cannot tell *exactly*," said Polly, anxious to help all she could. "I *think* it has something to do with red roses. Sometimes I hear people talking about red roses as they go through our yard. But

I will ask my mother, *she* went to the garden once, a long time ago, and maybe she will remember."

The bee-girl jumped up and ran into the house. In a few minutes she came back, bringing two bowls of bread and milk.

"Mother sends you these," she said, "for she knows you must be hungry. And she says, when you go from here, you will know you are in the right path if, every seventh step, you come to a red rose. But after a while the flower changes, and she don't remember what it is then. Still the red roses will lead you quite a distance."

"Thank you!" said the Kanter girls, and when they had eaten their bread and milk they kissed Polly good-by and went out of the little yard, leaving her to sit down again contentedly, sewing piece-work and watching bees.

At every seventh step they passed a red rose in the hedge, so that they knew they were taking the right direction, and this lasted until they had made several turns, when all on a sudden, the path divided into three paths again, with not a rose to be seen in any one of them. As the Kanter girls looked down them, in one path they saw an occasional nasturtium running over the hedge, in the next there were honeysuckles here and there, and

in the third a trumpet-creeper appeared at what seemed to be regular intervals. This was the path Janet and Prue finally decided to take.

They walked along it in pretty good spirits, fancying that they really began to smell the garden flowers again, when, after passing a dozen or more trumpet-creepers, the path turned and brought them face to face with an immense gray rock, as steep as the side of a house, which completely blocked the way.

"There, now!" exclaimed Janet.

"Oh! dear," sighed Prue, "I wish we could push you away, old rock!"

And she kicked it two or three times with her little foot as she spoke.

"Coming! coming! Oh! my heart, what a pother!" creaked a sharp, querulous voice, and out of a cranny in the rock, stepped nimbly their old friend, the little green man.

"I'm all out of breath, I have hurried so!" he piped, panting. "My wife had just sent me to pick up her ball of gray yarn when you called me, and I've run so fast I'm all in a palpitation. Oh! my, what a scolding I shall get when I go back without that ball of gray yarn. What do you want now? You didn't come in the boat, did you?"

"I'm *very* sorry I disturbed you," said Prue, gently; "I just *happened* to hit the rock. But now you are here, can you tell us the way to the big, beautiful flower-garden?"

"I don't know," he answered, disconsolately. "It will be the hardest work I ever did in my life. Follow me, and I'll see."

The Kanter girls followed him, turn after turn, back through the trumpet-creeper path, till they came once more to the parting of the three ways.

"This way!" said their guide starting briskly down the path where now and then a sweet honeysuckle ran over the hedge. Suddenly he stopped short, staring at something on the ground.

"What's that?" he cried, pointing at it.

"Only a bit of gray yarn," said Prue, bending to pick it up.

"I might have known it!" he said, in an aggrieved manner. "I might have known my wife had been to the garden when she brought home her apron full of poppy leaves! She let the ball drop out of her pocket, and here it is, all unwound. A pretty job!"

"Maybe I can help you," said Prue, beginning to wind the yarn up as she walked along.

"Of course you can!" he exclaimed, brightly.

"It just occurs to me. Don't you see? She went to the garden, and the yarn goes to the garden, and if you wind it all up you'll get there! Then you can put the ball in your pocket and bring it to me. I'll go home to dinner now."

And in an instant he had disappeared.

The Kanter girls walked on, Prue winding as she went, and no matter what tempting paths they passed, they followed the guiding gray yarn.

"It's growing quite a big ball," said Prue; and hardly had she said it, when the path made a sharp turn, and there they were, walking right into the garden.



VIII

> " A brave old house ! A garden full of bees,
> Large, dropping poppies, and queen hollyhocks
> With butterflies for crowns—tree-peonies
> And pinks and goldilocks."
>
> —*Jean Ingelow.*

> " How do you like to go up in a swing,
> Up in the air so blue ?
> Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
> Ever a child can do."
>
> —*Robert Louis Stevenson.*

"OH ! how sweet the air is, and how the birds do sing ! " exclaimed Janet.

The little golden-haired girl came running to meet them.

"*Now* you can play with me," she said, joyously. " My name is Althea. What are your names ? "

The Kanter girls told their names, and then, as they said they wanted to see the flower-beds first of

all, she moved ahead of them up and down the little pebbly paths.

"I never saw so many kinds of roses in all my life," cried Janet; "and, oh! Prue, see all those mountain daisies, red ones and white ones."

"*Couldn't* we have some roots to carry home?" asked Prue, eagerly.

"Yes, you may have all you want," said Althea.

"And see all the trellises full of sweet-peas," went on Janet, in a rapture; "and I *never* saw pink peonies before, nor such big, *big* white lilies."

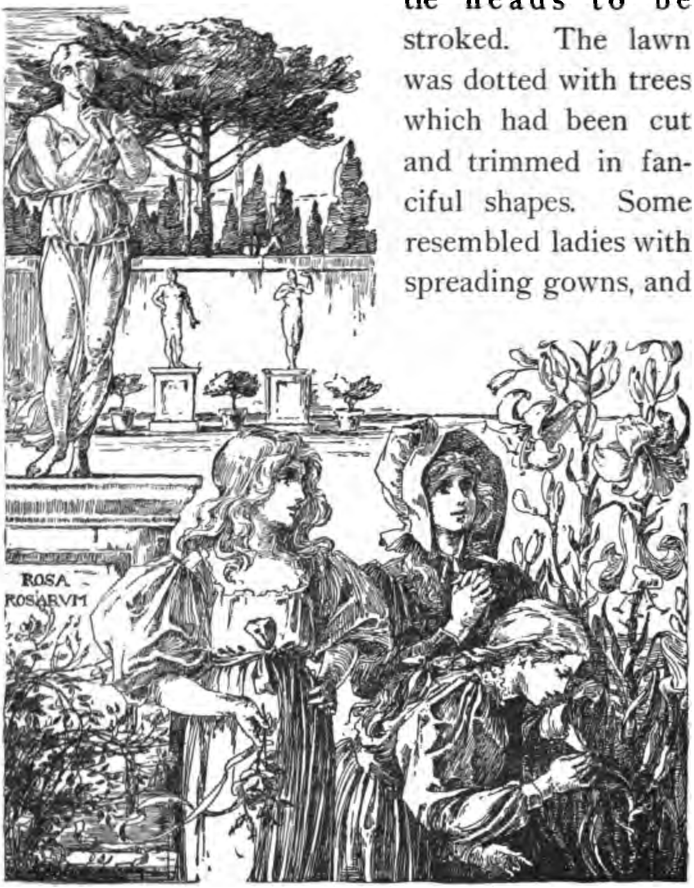
"Nor scarlet lilies either, nor double violets," said Prue.

It did seem, indeed, as if so many beautiful flowers had never bloomed together before in all the world; such masses of phlox, and of geraniums, such clumps of pansies, such beds of great, glowing poppies, banks of sweet honeysuckles, stalks of hollyhocks, and a countless crowd of sweet-williams, carnations, and gilliflowers.

"I wish I could have some gilliflower seed for mother," said Prue.

"You may have all you want," said Althea. She had a curiously soft, slow, measured way of speaking, which the Kanter girls wondered at a little, it was so different from their own impulsive speech.

They went along by the fountains next, and across the lawn, where the pretty brown and white deer came up to them confidingly, and allowed their gentle heads to be stroked. The lawn was dotted with trees which had been cut and trimmed in fanciful shapes. Some resembled ladies with spreading gowns, and



some were like huge baskets. But the largest tree was trimmed in the shape of an open umbrella, and it gave a beautiful shade. Under it, Prue found pretty, little white flowers, closed up like buds.

"Oh! here are go-to-bed-noons," she cried, "and they are all closed up, so it must be after twelve o'clock, Janet."

"I am glad you have come to play with me," said Althea. "Let us go and have a swing."

"Oh! yes," said the Kanter girls. She then led them to another part of the lawn, where there was a fine swing, fastened to one of the limbs of an apple-tree.

"Who shall swing first?" asked Janet. "Let's count around."

She did the counting-around herself, beginning with Prue.

"Six–men–driving–cattle–don't–you–hear–their buckets–rattle–one–two–three–out–goes–*she!*"

It was Janet who was left, when the others were counted out, and she stepped toward the swing, saying,

"You swing me, and afterward I will swing you."

"Tom will swing us," said Althea; "he's here on purpose for that."

The Kanter girls now, for the first time, noticed a man standing motionless close by the tree. He had a light brown complexion and dull eyes, and was dressed in sort of a gray livery.

"Will you please swing me, sir?" asked Janet, addressing him in a very polite manner, but he made no reply and did not stir.

"He isn't one of the talking kind," said Althea; "but if you will get in, he will swing you."

"Dumb, I suppose," thought Janet, as she took her seat in the swing. Immediately the man moved forward, and began to push her with a strong, even motion, so that presently her feet touched the green leaves when she went up, and she shouted with delight. But she felt that the others ought to have their turn, so in a minute more she called out to the man,

"Now stop, and let the old cat die!"

But the man kept right on pushing the same as before.

"He'll stop when it's a hundred," said Althea. "He pushes just a hundred times, and then he stops."

Janet was very willing to finish her hundred, and when at last the swing stopped, she sprang out and said,

"Now, Prue, you must go next. It is splendid."

Prue hesitated. She thought she had never in her life seen a man so stiff and solemn, and she was a little afraid of him. However, she decided to try it, and, as soon as she was seated, he began to swing her just as he had swung Janet. It *was* fine, flying through the air, in that way.

When she had her hundred, Althea took *her* turn, and when that too, was finished, the man stepped to the side of the tree again, standing there as motionless as before.

"I would thank him if he were not so *very* deaf and dumb," said Janet.

Just then a bell rang in the red and green castle, which was not far away, and another man, dressed also in gray livery, came over the lawn, bowed respectfully, and said, in a somewhat hoarse voice,

"Lunch is served."

"Now you must go in with me and have something to eat," said Althea, taking the little girls by the hand. The man followed behind them silently. He had brighter eyes than the other man, and redder cheeks, but still there was something about him that did not seem quite natural to Prue, and she was a little afraid of him also. Still, she considered, perhaps he had rheumatism and a very bad cold.

Althea led them up the marble steps, through a hall, into the dining-room, where there was a table with flowers and grapes upon it.



"Be seated," said the man, hoarsely, drawing out three chairs.

"Nothing but grapes!" said Althea, in her soft, slow voice.

The man moved out of the room, and returned bringing plates of cake and biscuit.

"Now help yourselves," said the little, golden-haired hostess, taking a biscuit in her own hands to set the example.

The Kanter girls felt rather timid, but the biscuit and cake looked nice, so they ventured to eat.

"May we taste the grapes too?" asked Janet, looking with longing at the purple and white clusters.

"You may have all you want," said Althea.

There certainly never were such delicious grapes as those which the Kanter girls feasted upon that day. As they ate, they heard the music of a piano in another apartment, and Prue asked who was playing.

"Oh! it is only Tonne," replied Althea. "I'll take you to see her now that you have finished your grapes."



The sound of the drums

IX

> " What am I seeking? I'm out of my wits!
> Where is the key?"
>
> —*Ibsen*

RISING from the table, they crossed the hall, and entered an immense and magnificent parlor, whose dark crimson curtains subdued all the light. Stepping noiselessly over the thick, soft carpet, they approached the piano, where a lady sat playing. She had very red cheeks and bright eyes, and she wore a blue silk dress. She did not seem to notice them at all.

"She never misses a note," said Althea. "That is 'Home, Sweet Home' that she is playing now."

Janet thought to herself that the lady's fingers struck the keys like little hammers, but she did not speak of it, and only said when the tune was finished:

"That is pretty. Won't she play it again!"



"Oh! she *can't*," said Althea, "she has to play 'The Last Rose of Summer' next."

Tonne did in fact begin to play "The Last Rose of Summer," but she stopped in the middle of it, and sat motionless.

"She didn't finish," said Althea; "I must speak to my father about it."

"Hasn't she fainted?" asked Prue in alarm, but

Althea only laughed, and led her visitors away with her up the broad stairs, through one lovely room after another. In the third room they found a woman sitting with a book in her lap. She had on a gray dress, a white apron, and a neat white cap.

Althea went up and touched her shoulder.

"Let us see that book," she said.

The woman rose, courtsied, and held out the book, saying,

"Certainly—you—may— "

And there she stopped short, while the Kanter girls stared at her.

"She's run down," said Althea, calmly, and taking a key from her pocket, she put it under the woman's arm, and turned it.

"—have it," finished the woman, and giving the book to Althea she sat down again.

"Let us go," whispered Prue. "I'm afraid of her, she is so queer!"

"Why, she isn't alive," said Althea. "She's only an automaton. She has works inside her like a clock, and has to be wound up to make her go."

"An automaton!" exclaimed Janet; "and was the lady who played an automaton too, and the man who called us to lunch?"

"Yes, indeed," said Althea, laughing. "They all belong to the castle. My father has the care of them, and he lets me wind them up all I want to."

"Where *is* your father?" asked Janet, almost fearing that he might prove to be an automaton too.

"Oh! he lives in a cottage just outside the garden. I come here every day to play!"

"Does he own the garden and the castle?" asked Prue.

"No, indeed! They belong to a baronial lord. I thought everybody knew that. He is so rich that he owns thousands of chests of gold, and so stern that you would tremble if he looked at you. He built this place just for amusement, but he has so many castles that he hardly ever comes here."

"I hope he won't come while we are here," said Prue anxiously.

"I don't think he will," said Althea, "for he was here only last week. If he *should* find you here, he would be terribly angry, but we always know when he enters the Maze, because his guards beat drums and blow trumpets for a warning."

The three little girls now went downstairs, and as they passed through the hall, the gray-clad automaton near the door said, more hoarsely and slowly than before,

"*Lunch—is—served.*"

"He hasn't quite run down yet," said Althea laughing, and then she led the way out on the red and green marble steps. There the girls stood and looked upon the lawn and garden.

"It is very wonderful and beautiful," said Prue, "but I should not want to *live* here. May I pick one of those climbing roses?"

"You may have all you want," said Althea, in her slow, soft voice. Just at this moment, as they stood looking out, with the golden rays of the afternoon sun shining aslant upon the fragrant flower-beds and the plashing fountains, they heard the faint sound of distant music. Gradually it seemed to draw nearer and grow louder, and they could distinguish—yes, it *was!*—the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets! The baronial lord was coming!

The Kanter girls trembled and grew pale. Althea herself looked alarmed. A man now entered the garden and ran toward them, a *real* man, Janet was sure, he ran so fast and breathed so hard.

"Child!" he panted as he reached them, "where are the keys? Are the figures all wound up? Who are these girls? Let them hide themselves as quick as they can!"

"We won't hide, we will go away!" said Janet, provoked at herself for feeling so frightened, but calling loudly,

"*Come, birds, come!*"

In an instant down swept the green birds with the golden chariot, and the Kanter girls, springing into it, were carried up into the air, where at a safe distance they paused and gave a farewell glance back at the garden.

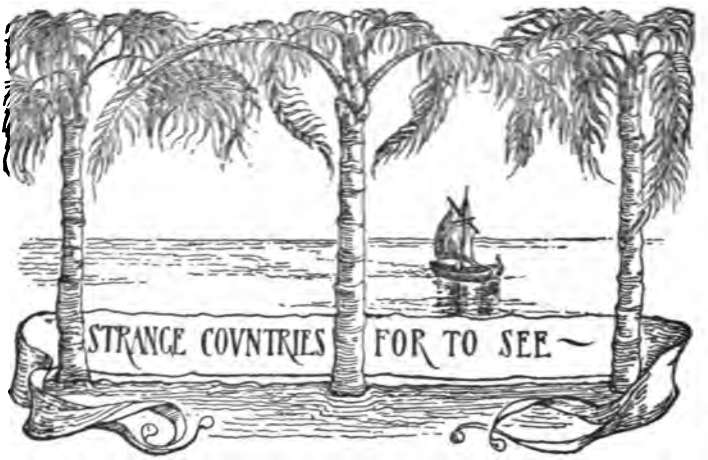
In that last look, they saw Althea sinking upon the marble steps as if she had fainted away, while her father ran distractedly hither and thither. At the garden entrance, a brilliant procession was making its way in, while the drums and trumpets sounded louder than ever.

Then the birds flew on and away, over mountains and cities, over rivers and valleys, and over the broad blue sea, homeward bound.

"There! I forgot those gilliflower seeds!" said Prue, suddenly.

"And those daisy roots," said Janet. "I should rather like to have seen the baronial lord, too!"

"*I* don't want to see him," said Prue, "I am afraid of them all. I am even a little afraid of Althea now!"



X

> " There a long line of breakers could we see,
> That on a yellow sandy beach did fall,
> And then a belt of grass, and then a wall
> Of green trees, rising dark against the sky."
>
> — *William Morris.*

"PRUE," said Janet one day, when they ran out of the cottage for a good long play-time, "you know that picture in our geography of the land where there is always snow, and the houses are made of snow and ice; don't you?"

"Yes," said Prue, "and the people wear fur clothes."

"Well," said Janet, "that is where I want to go next in our chariot."

"But *I* want to go to some beautiful island," said Prue, "where it is always warm, and where there are cocoanuts and oranges growing."

They talked the matter over a little while, and then decided to visit the cold country first, and after that some lovely, lonely, tropical island, where there were no savages. So they called the birds, and in a moment more were rising above the treetops in the golden chariot.

"To the land where the houses are made of ice and snow," directed Janet, and the birds flew swiftly northward.

The character of the country beneath them changed. Soon there were no more gardens and orchards to be seen, but dark-green woods of pine and fir, and after these came rough, rocky hills, and barren wastes. Then they entered a region of snow, and passed over frozen seas, alighting at last in the midst of a little settlement of white, round-roofed huts, looking, so Janet said, like mushrooms without any stems.

"But it is dark," said Prue, "though we can see pretty well. It is like clear moonlight."

"There, now!" exclaimed Janet. "I do believe this is one of the countries where the nights are six months long. But, oh! just see that little girl all

bundled up in a fur dress. What is your name, little girl?"

"Brenda," replied the child, coming toward them. "Who are you?"

"We are little girls from the temperate zone, come to play with you," explained Prue, shivering as she spoke, for the air was very cold.

"This is Polo," said Brenda, as a little fur-clad boy drew near. Other children were gathering shyly around.

"Let's play something," said Janet, and she led the way, running up and down, and tossing handfuls of snow. Brenda and Polo ran too, shouting, but Prue stood still with chattering teeth.

"I don't want to stay any longer," she said. "I am so cold in this thin dress."

"I am cold too," said Janet, as she left off running. "I am so glad we have found where you live, Fur-children, and we will come to see you again very soon. But we are not dressed warmly enough to stay now, and we'd rather be here when it is day-time."

"Come into my house, and I will give you some of my clothes," said little Brenda, and, as she spoke, she stooped down and disappeared in an opening in the snow. Janet and Prue crept after her, for

they had read in their geography that this was the proper way to enter a snow-hut. Inside, they found Brenda's mother sitting on a heap of furs, and diligently sewing the two parts of a slipper together, with a bone needle. She smiled at the little visitors, and made no objection when Brenda brought forth two little coats of silver-gray fur, with hoods and mittens to match, and gave them to the Kanter girls.

The children were delighted, but Janet said with prim politeness, as she had heard grown people do, "I am afraid you will rob yourself."

"Oh! no," said Brenda, "my father kills so many silver-gray foxes, that my mother doesn't know what to do with all the skins."



Then the woman arose, and took from a bowl great pieces of walrus meat, which she gave to the children. They were hungry, so they ate some, and it did not taste bad to them. After that they put on the coats, which fitted beautifully, and went out of the snow-hut with Brenda, quite ready for a frolic again.

"But oh! dear," said Prue, after they had had three games of tag, "I keep feeling as if it were bed-time here, and I want to go to my tropical island. Come, Janet!"

So they summoned their chariot, said good-by to the little Fur-children, who looked after them wistfully, and with many promises to come soon again, they rose in the air and floated rapidly away.

"Now for my island!" exclaimed Prue, as, after the space of about half an hour, the chariot began to descend, and they could see beneath them a beautiful shore, and trees loaded with fruit. They had been obliged before this to lay aside the pretty coats, and hoods, and mittens, which had become burdensome in the warmer air.

"Let's stop first at the top of one of the cocoanut-trees," said Janet, "and gather some cocoanuts, because when we are on the ground we can't reach up to them."

This was a good idea, and the chariot stopped long enough for them to throw down a dozen or so, then finishing its descent, allowed them to step out on the shore.



XI

> " My dream is of an island place
>   Which distant seas keep lonely ;
> A little island, on whose face
>   The stars are watchers only.
> Those bright, still stars ! they need not seem
>   Brighter nor stiller in my dream ! "
>
> —*E. B. Browning.*

THEY found the sand strewn with bits of coral, and numbers of delicate little shells, some of which they gathered and put in their pockets. Then they took off their shoes and stockings, and went wading for a while in the clear, rippling water, till Janet suddenly remembered that there might be crocodiles around, and the bare thought made them hasten back on the land again. The grass grew very luxuriantly, and there were a great many beautiful flowers, with brilliant butterflies hovering about them. Birds of gorgeous plumage flew overhead, now and then alighting,

and looking at the Kanter girls with unterrified eyes. One gayly colored macaw, in particular, seemed determined to keep in their neighborhood, and whichever way they turned, he would almost immediately appear on some rock or shrub close by.

"I wish I knew how to talk to him," said Prue.

It was still early in the afternoon, and the sun shone with such heat that Janet said they had better walk in the shade, where the trees were thicker.

So they took a little path which led them along in a roundabout way among the trees, and presently brought them into an orange-grove, where the oranges grew as thick as the apples in their father's apple orchard at home.

"The ripest and yellowest are at the top," said Janet, looking up. "How shall we manage to get them? I think I will try to climb."

But just as she took hold of a bough, the macaw settled down upon it and screamed at her, so she drew back and stood hesitating.

"I hear voices up in the trees," said Prue, catching her by the arm, "but it isn't like our language, and I can't tell what they say. Oh! look, don't you see a boy up there?"

"Yes, and he is going to throw oranges at us!"

exclaimed Janet, dodging just in time to escape the biggest one she ever saw.

They could hear a great chattering now in the tree-tops, as if there were at least five or six boys there, and oranges came tumbling down on every side.

"Do you suppose they are savages?" whispered Prue, as she and Janet sought refuge close by the trunk of the largest tree.

"I'm afraid they are," said Janet. "Oh! dear, oh! dear, there is one climbing now down that tree. I never saw a common person look like that! I know it is a savage boy, but maybe he is too young to have a bow and arrows or spears!"

The savage boy now leaped to the ground, and was followed by four or five others, all grinning and chattering and gesticulating. They seated themselves on the soft green grass and began to eat oranges, beckoning to the Kanter girls, as if inviting them to join them.

"I never saw such big, juicy oranges," said Janet; "and, oh! Prue, I do believe they are not savages at all, they are just big apes! Don't let's be afraid of them."

So the little girls edged along slowly, and as soon as they reached the oranges they sat down on the

grass and began to eat. They found the golden fruit so sweet, so delicious, and so refreshing that it seemed as if they could never have enough of it.

It was a strange little lunch party they made there, on the shady bank of the tropical island, the Kanter girls with their bonnets falling back on their shoulders, their eager eyes and rosy cheeks, and the wild, grotesque apes with hairy legs and arms, and constant grin and chatter; the macaw perched on a branch near by, watching them; and there were birds of Paradise, and humming-birds, coming and going all the time.

The feast went on very peaceably for some time, till at last, unfortunately, Prue put out her hand to take a fine orange which one of the apes had just selected for himself. As quick as a flash he slapped her rudely, and then all the apes sprang to their feet at once, and the macaw began to scream with all his might.

"Let's go away!" said Janet, trying to speak calmly and taking her sister by the hand. But as they turned the apes sprang after them, seizing them by their aprons and dresses, so that they could not get away.

"Oh! they will drag us off to their houses," sobbed Prue, overcome with terror.

"Our rings! our rings!" cried Janet, and immediately both the little girls plunged their hands into their pockets.

The skinny, hairy hands of the apes suddenly ceased clutching, for there was nothing to clutch. Where had their victims gone? They ran about, searching fiercely for a few moments, and then, as if accusing one another, had a rough-and-tumble fight together, wrestling, growling, and scratching, and finally took themselves off out of sight and sound, disappearing among distant trees.



XII

> " What tale ne'er to be told, of folk unborn?
> What images of gray-clad damsels sweet
> Shall cross thy sward with dainty, noiseless feet?"
>
> —*William Morris.*

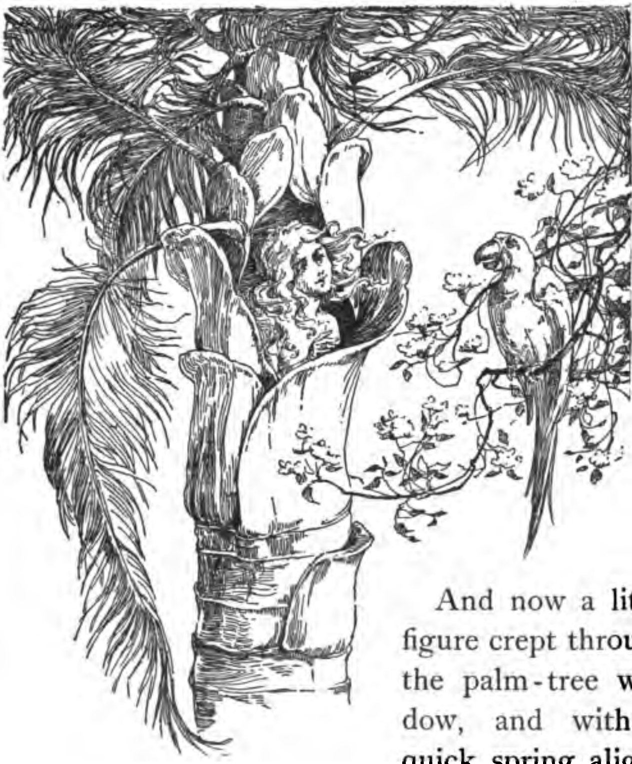
HOW still it was after they went! Only the breeze rustling the leaves ever so faintly, only the mute fluttering of the butterflies, only the soft low chance note of a bird. The macaw stepped down upon the ground, and hopped about as if uncertain which way to go.

Suddenly, in the trunk of a palm-tree near by, a window seemed to open, the bark parting like blinds, and the sweetest, merriest face in the world peeped out, about six feet above the ground.

"Can't you find them, macaw?"

These words were uttered in a musical, teasing voice. The macaw shook his head solemnly.

"Well, never mind, I'll come down there a little while myself. Please just stand out of the way!"



And now a little figure crept through the palm-tree window, and with a quick spring alighted on the grassy turf in the very spot where, a short time before, the feast of oranges had been held. This new-comer was a little girl with brown eyes, brown hair that twisted and curled like vine-ten-

drils, and she wore a scant gown of changeable green and wood color.

"They have left me at least *one*, I am glad to see!" she said, joyously, picking up an orange that lay on the grass. The macaw was still hopping and peering uncertainly about.

"Oh! you needn't search any longer!" exclaimed the little girl. "They are safe enough inside of their trees by this time, and they will never be so venturesome again. I only wish I knew *which* trees they belong in," she added, with a sigh, "because then we might talk across to each other sometimes, on moonlight nights."

She began to skip and dance, all by herself, over the grass, now and then gathering flowers and again throwing them down. Suddenly the macaw screamed, and she darted to the side of the palm-tree, clinging to it so closely that she almost seemed to become a part of it; but in a moment more she ran out again, and said, laughingly:

"Why did you scream, macaw? There is nothing here! Did you think the two little dryads were coming back? I wish they *would* come, I am so lonely here with nobody but grandmother!"

"Here we are!" exclaimed two merry voices together, and there, all on a sudden, were Janet and

Prue, holding the little palm-tree girl's hands in their hands, and pressing their warm, rosy lips against her cheeks.

"You are such a darling!" said Janet.

"Why, where *did* you come from?" asked the little girl. "Do you live in any of these trees close by? I never saw you before."

"Live in trees!" laughed Janet. "Why, what do you take us for?"

"Aren't you dryads?" the little one said, looking startled. "*I* am a dryad, and I thought you were some of my cousins from the trees on the bank!"

"Oh! no," said Prue, "we are just little girls. But we saw you come out of that tree. How did you do it?"

"That is my home," said the little dryad, wonderingly. "Oh! dear—oh! dear, I have made a mistake! My old grandmother told me never to leave my tree unless other dryads were out, and now she will give me a scolding. There, she sees me!"

The Kanter girls glanced where she pointed, and there, from the trunk of a very old fig-tree, peered a stern, dark face, and a hand beckoned imperatively.

"Oh! *don't* go back!" entreated Janet, as the little dryad hesitated.

A mischievous, rebellious gleam came into the pretty brown eyes.

"I *won't* go back!" she said. "I'll pretend I don't see her. I have never been away from under these trees in my life, and I have always wanted to go down on the shore and see the waves."

"Well, let's go now," said Prue, and away they ran, all three of them, taking hold of hands. The macaw flew screaming after them, and from a great many of the trees that they passed, startled faces looked out, and voices cried,

"Come back, sister! Come back, sister!"

But the little dryad only laughed mockingly, and did not once stop running till she reached the sandy shore. There she stood, looking out on the sea, the blue, billowy sea, with its great pulsating waves, fringed with foam, beating at her feet.

"I don't understand it! I don't understand it!" she said, softly.

"See the dear little shells down under your feet," said Prue; "I have my pocket half full, and I am going to pick up some more."

The child-dryad stooped and gathered a few, silver- and rose-colored. Then she took up some of the shining sand, and sifted it through her fingers.

"I wish I could live in a rock or a shell," she said, wistfully. "Then I would stay here forever."

"Do dryads have names?" asked Prue.



"My name is Sylvie," answered the little one.

"I wonder if there are any dryads in the trees near our house," said Janet.

"Why, don't you live in your trees yourselves?" asked Sylvie.

The Kanter girls laughed merrily.

"We *do* live in a house of trees," replied Prue, "but the trees had to be cut down first, and sawed into boards."

"There! I *thought* you were a sort of dryad!" exclaimed Sylvie, triumphantly. "Where *is* your house?"

"Oh! it is in another country, very far away," said

Janet, adding, earnestly, "I do wish you would let us take you there to live, we want another little sister so much. There is an old pear-tree in the corner of our yard, by the stone wall, and I know there isn't any dryad living in it, for when I stand on tiptoe on the wall, I can just make out to look down in a deep hole there is in the trunk, and it is all dark and empty. I dropped some little stones in there one day. Can't you come and live in that tree? We will go there and play with you every day."

"Oh! do, *do*, DO!" entreated Prue, throwing her arms about the little dryad, and kissing her.

"I wonder if I dare?" said the dryad, thoughtfully.

"Oh! please, *please* do!" chorused the Kanter girls.

The macaw, who had mounted a gray rock close by, flapped his wings and screamed warningly.

"I believe I *will* go," said Sylvie, "if only to get away from the macaw. I will go and live in your pear-tree in your far-away country. But how can you take me there?"

"In our chariot," said Janet, eagerly. "I'll call the birds, Prue, and you gather up the cocoanuts in your apron, and we'll go right straight off!"

In a few moments more, they were all three

seated in the chariot, and gently rising in the air. Sylvie looked down on the beautiful island which had always been her home.

"Good-by, sisters! good-by, macaw!" she said, and there was just a little sadness in her voice, but still she wanted to go.



XIII

> " I would with such an one confer,
> To know what strange things chanced to her."
>
> —*Philip Bourke Marston.*

AWAY, over sea and land, over mountains and valleys, onward the chariot sped, and the sun was not yet setting when it came softly to the ground, right among the hollyhocks in the yard by the little brown cottage. Sylvie was pale and trembling as she stepped out.

" The pear-tree ! quick, quick ! " she whispered, " I am so frightened here."

The Kanter girls hurried her to the corner by the stone wall, and the instant she reached the tree she

sprang lightly up to the opening in the trunk, and immediately disappeared within. The Kanter girls waited a little while, and then called her anxiously.

"Sylvie! Sylvie!"

Presently her face appeared at the opening, and she looked more at her ease.

"It is very nice in here," she said, "though I think no one has lived here for a long, long time. But I shall get used to it pretty soon, and get things settled."

"Mamma is calling us in," said Janet, "so we must go now. But we will come to-morrow morning, and bring you things and play. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" replied Sylvie, drawing her pretty head in.

"Are there any bed-clothes?" asked Prue, lingering.

"Everything I want," answered the little dryad, far down in the trunk.

When the Kanter girls went to bed that night, the last thing they said, before going to sleep, was, "Oh! how very nice it is to have a little dryad of our own!"

When they awoke in the morning, their first thought was of Sylvie, but their mother wanted

their help about getting breakfast and clearing it away, so that it was not until the dew was nearly dried off the grass that they made their way to the old, hollow pear-tree, carrying in their hands a doll, a picture-book, a cup of milk, and a piece of cake.

"Sylvie! Sylvie!" they called, and instantly her bright little face appeared at the opening.

"Come down and play," they cried. "See, we have brought things for you."

The little dryad laughed.

"I don't care for things like that," she said, "but I should like to run about over the grass, and I should like to see your house."

She sprang down, bringing in her hand a string of beads, which Janet hailed with delight.

"I lost them ever so long ago," she said, "but I did not know they were down in the pear-tree. I must have dropped them there."

Prue now pointed out the window of the room where she and Janet slept. A wistaria vine had grown up to the very sill.

"Come into the house," said Prue, "and we will take you upstairs."

"Those are my stairs on the outside," said Sylvie, quickly; "I am afraid to go up any way but my own."

And running to the vine, she climbed it with such ease and lightness that the children had hardly time to cry, "Oh!" before she was safe inside the window, smiling down at them.

The Kanter girls went up the usual way, and joined Sylvie in their little bed-chamber, where they began to take out one treasure after another to show to her. But Sylvie did not seem properly impressed by their Sunday hats, and their best hair-ribbons, and she laughed with merry disdain at their proposal to lend her shoes and stockings to cover her little bare feet. There was, however, a small green parasol of Prue's, which she at first wondered at, and then took such delight in, that Prue made her a present of it on the spot.

While the Kanter girls were thus occupied with their guest, their mother opened the door at the foot of the stairs and called them to dinner. This startled Sylvie, and she retreated toward the window, but Janet and Prue seized her good-naturedly, and compelled her to go down with them, and to take a seat between them at the table. Their mother spoke kindly to her, gave her a plate, and helped her like the rest.

But the little woodland dryad was not used to such food, and she ate nothing, but looked sadly

across the table at the open door, as if longing to flee away.

When dinner was over, the pitying mother noticing what scanty clothing Sylvie wore, took her into another room and pinned about her shoulders a little shawl which Janet could easily spare. The dryad stood patiently, afraid to object.

" But I want only my own little gown," she said, timidly.

"Oh! nonsense, dear, you'd take cold," said the girls' mother. Meanwhile the girls waited with eagerness for their playmate.

" Shall we go upstairs again, or out in the garden ?" they asked, the moment she was free to join them.

But she did not stop to answer. She sprang through the doorway, over the steps, and across the grassy yard, with such fleet feet that they could not overtake her, and by the time they reached the pear-tree, she was already safely hidden within it. But they thought they could see her peeping out at them from a crevice.

" Come and play with us !" they cried.

" I can't play any more to-day," she said, wearily, "I am too tired."

Janet was compassionate. " Poor little thing," she

said, "never mind, we will come again for you to-morrow."

"Yes, to-morrow!" answered the little dryad, and her voice breathed so much sadness that it quite haunted the Kanter girls for the rest of the afternoon.

But, oh! how many plans they made about her! They were so glad that they had brought her away from the island, and that they had her safe in their own pear-tree.

"We will dress her just like ourselves," said Janet, "and we will teach her how to sew and mend."

"Yes, and teach her to read," said Prue, "and have her learn the multiplication-table."

Then they planned which of their aprons they would give her, and which of their playthings. They thought they would let her have some of their story-books, and they would cut out sewing work for her, and let her help them weed their flower-beds. She would be like a little new sister, and maybe their father would take her and them over to the next town, in the wagon, some day, and have their picture taken all together.



XIV

> "Rhæcus, I am the Dryad of this tree,
> The rain and sunshine are my caterers,
> Nor have I other bliss than simple life.
>
> —*James Russell Lowell.*

THE next morning, as early as possible, the Kanter girls hastened to the pear-tree to call Sylvie. They were almost provoked when they found, lying on the grass under the tree, the nice, warm shawl which their mother had so kindly put upon the little, scantily dressed dryad.

"It seems as if she was just determined to catch cold and have rheumatism!" said Janet, with an air of mature wisdom, and then she called,

"Sylvie! Sylvie!"

But there was no answer. No bright little face peeped out from the hollow trunk above her.

She called again and again, and so did Prue. They called kindly, and then impatiently, and then coaxingly, and finally they commanded her, but all in vain. There was no answer, no little face, and a strange dread crept over them.

"Let's climb up and look in," said Janet, softly.

"I'm afraid," whispered Prue. "You do it, Janet."

So Janet climbed up with difficulty, but could see nothing in the deep, dark hollow. Then Prue found a long stick, and Janet, taking it, pushed it away down inside the tree; but there was nothing there, absolutely nothing, unless it might be a few dead leaves.

"She's *run away!*" said Janet, dropping to the ground, and looking at Prue with a very sober face.

"Yes, she must have run away," sighed Prue.

They took up the shawl that she had cast off. She had gone away clad only in her own little wood-green gown. The burden of civilization was too great for her, and she had fled.

"I suppose," said Janet, thoughtfully, "maybe she did not like to go into houses and do the way folks do."

"I'm so sorry we tried to make her," mourned

Prue; "she would have been so lovely to play with, in the fields."

"Well, anyway, she has carried off that green parasol," said Janet.

"That's good!" exclaimed Prue; "it will make her remember us!"

They felt so depressed at the loss of their little dryad, that they did not play very much that day, but in the afternoon they took a walk up the woody hill behind the house, for it seemed to them as though they might perhaps find Sylvie hiding there.

They pushed on and on, without having much of a path to follow, but they did not mind the underbrush, and the air was sweet, and the birds sang overhead. Every little while they called "Sylvie! Sylvie!" very gently, but there was no answer but the singing of the birds.

After they had climbed the hill for about an hour, they found the trees growing farther apart, and there were rocks covered with gray moss, where the sun shone down. As the Kanter girls were tired, they sat on one of these rocks to rest.

"This is a very pretty place," said Janet, when she had regained her breath a little.

"Yes, indeed," said Prue; "and see that little brook running over a rock and shining."

"If Sylvie came away up here, she would like it too well to go any farther," remarked Janet.

Was it a little ripple of laughter they heard, or only the plash of the shining, shallow brook? They looked before them, and behind them, and on every side, but the sound had ceased.

"What is that big green leaf, in the side of that birch-tree, as far as you can see, over there?" asked Prue. "It doesn't look like a birch-leaf."

"We'll go and see," said Janet, springing up.

They ran together toward the tree, and as they neared it Janet exclaimed:

"Why! It is your green parasol, Prue, just as true as ever you live!"

"Then Sylvie is there! Oh, Sylvie, Sylvie!" cried Prue, eagerly.

As they reached the tree and stopped breathless, the parasol moved a little, was closed, and drawn in, and in another instant Sylvie herself peeped out at them, a little timidly, but smiling.

"What made you run away?" demanded Janet.

"*Do* come back!" pleaded Prue. "We have not shown you the pretty pasture, nor the river-banks! Do come back to the pear-tree again!"

"Oh! no," murmured the little dryad, with a shudder. "I do not like your houses, and your

roads, and the men and wheels, and the dreadful tramping and barking! I love you dearly, little sisters, but I must stay among the trees, and with my own people."

"Are there other dryads here?" asked Janet, looking about her anxiously.

The little dryad nodded.

"Plenty of them," she whispered, "but they don't want you to know it. If you came here hunting for them, they would all go away to other forests where no human foot ever treads. But they love this spot, and I love it too, and I found a home in this dear tree as soon as I reached it in the night."

"Come out and play with us on the rocks," coaxed Prue.

But the little dryad shook her head.

"I cannot play with you any more," she said, a little sadly; "I must never come out again except when the dryads call me. I dare not venture. But I love this spot, and I shall live happily here, only you must not come to frighten the dryads, or we shall all depart together."

"Oh! dear," said Prue, with tears in her eyes, "I did not want to lose you!"

Janet now argued and entreated, but it was all in vain, the little dryad grew firmer still, and at last

drew her pretty curly head quite down out of sight.

The Kanter girls waited under the birch-tree, and called her several times, but she would not show herself again, so at last, as the sun was getting low, and there were clouds coming over the sky, they slowly left the place to go down the hill, homeward bound.

When they were about entering the thicker part of the forest, they heard, far behind them, a sweet little voice calling faintly,

"Good-by!"

They turned and caught one last glimpse of Sylvie. Prue said afterward that she was sure she saw other faces peeping from other trees.

"Good-by!" the Kanter girls called back in reply, and then, hand in hand, they ran down the hill as fast as the underbrush would let them, and were glad when they saw the smoke curling up from their own kitchen chimney, where they knew their dear mother was getting a nice warm supper ready for them.

"I like my own kind of folks," said Janet, as they entered the yard.

"So do I," answered Prue, "but I love Sylvie too, and I am *so* sorry she couldn't stay in the pear-tree!"



XV

> "Surely," said I, "surely that is
> Something at my window lattice."
>
> —*Edgar Allan Poe.*

> "To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower."
>
> —*William Blake.*

IT was a showery day. Part of the time the rain pattered down so briskly that the garden-paths were full of little pools, and the flowers hung their heads heavily, drenched, but rejoicing, for this was far better than the heat and dust of the days before. The Kanter girls were learning to hemstitch, and they took their work up into their own room, so as to hear the rain-drops on the low roof, which was a kind of home music that they always liked.

A part of the ceiling in their room slanted downward, because it was directly under the roof, but this slanting portion did not reach quite across the top on the one hand, nor quite down to the floor on the other hand, and it was always a mystery to the Kanter girls what there could be in the little cut-off places.

"Of course there *are* places," said Janet, positively, "for if you take a right-angled triangle, and cut off the sharp corners till you make it look like the shape of our room, it leaves two little empty triangles in those two corners, and they are triangular halls just as long as the room is. What I want to know is, what is in them."

"Besides," said Prue, "there are two more just such places belonging to the room next to this. And then, don't you know the ell our pantry is in, downstairs? The pantry doesn't reach up into the sharp part of the roof. The roof goes up a good deal higher, and yet there isn't any room of ours there, nor any way to get in there. There is a window in that part too, we can see it from the yard, you know, but father says it is only an imitation window, just for looks, and not a real one. The blinds are always closed, and it is smaller than our windows."



"I'll tell you," said Janet, lowering her voice mysteriously, "I do believe there is another family living in this house, and their rooms are in those places where we have never been."

Prue was delighted with this idea.

"I wish we could see them," she said. "The people must be smaller than we are. I have heard noises sometimes. If the rain were not so loud on the roof, maybe we could hear them now."

"Perhaps the rain isn't *all* that we hear," remarked Janet, suggestively, and then she went on to say, "There are a great many things that we can't see, and that I want to see so very much. There are the animals in a drop of water, and the little mites of things that live on plants. And I should like to go down into ant-hills, and in mouse-holes. But there isn't any way that we can manage it. We are not little enough, to begin with."

"No," said Prue, "we ought to be able to grow big or little, just as we like, and to go into any place as if we belonged there. I wish we could."

"Tap! tap! tap!" sounded something, rapping sharply at the window-pane, and there stood the beautiful bluebird on the sill.

The Kanter girls ran to open the window, and cried, "Come in! Come in!"

But the bird dropped from her bill two little packages into their hands, and stopping only long enough to say, "Good for *Thursdays* only, mind!" she flew away, shaking silvery drops from her wings.

"Oh! joy, joy!" exclaimed Prue, "I know there is something nice for us here!"

But when they opened the parcels, they found in each of them only a stout plaid apron with pockets. Prue put hers on and found it fitted very well.

"What a funny present!" said Janet, holding hers still in her hand.

There was a slip of a monthly rose growing quite vigorously in a flower-pot on the window-sill, and Prue, suddenly turning that way, remembered what Janet had said about tiny living things on plants. It occurred to her that perhaps she could see some of them if she tried very hard, and she stepped to the window.

"Where are you, Prue?" exclaimed Janet, the next instant, for Prue had vanished.

"She didn't go out of the room," said Janet to herself, "for I stood right here by the door. And she hasn't put her ring on, for that is in the pocket of her other dress. And she is not under the bed. But—that plaid apron! and this is Thursday. I'll put mine on."

She put it on as quickly as she could, but still not seeing Prue anywhere, she determined to go downstairs. At the foot of the stairs, a gray mouse darted before her and disappeared in a hole.

"Oh! that's where you live, is it?" said Janet, "I wish I could go in there with you!"

She bent down as she spoke, and suddenly found herself standing within, yes, *within* the hole, and the mouse was looking over his shoulder at her.

"Please don't go so fast," said Janet, "I want to look about a little. It isn't so dark as I thought it would be."

The mouse slackened his speed, and Janet trudged on after him, now and then jumping over bits of plaster, then turning corners, till at last he made a bold leap from beam to beam.

"Oh! I can't do *that!*" said Janet; "and on the whole, it is rather dismal in here. I think I will go home."

"It would be quite as well," said the mouse, sharply, and another leap took him out of sight.

Janet made her way back as best she could, and after reaching the stairway hastened to her room. There she found Prue waiting for her.

"Where have *you* been?" each demanded of the other.

Janet told her story, and then Prue said that she herself had been visiting the rose-tree, or rather she had meant to do so, in order to see what kind of creatures lived upon it. She had begun her journey

at the edge of the flower-pot, but she had become so very, very small, that the earth before her seemed heaped up like mountains, and it was such a long, tiresome task to cross them that she had to stop to rest.

"Then a fly, a thousand times as big as I was, lit down near by, and frightened me so, that all I could think of was to wish myself back with you in our room. And when I did that, here I found myself again. I took the plaid apron off, and put it away in the bureau."

"I think we ought to use our aprons more carefully," said Janet, after a little consideration. "We made a mistake, going to those places. What we wanted was to find out who lives in the parts of this house where we do not live, and as soon as you are rested, Prue, I wish you would put your apron on again, and come with me, for it will be a whole week before we have another Thursday."

"No," said Prue, shaking her head, "I am not going anywhere else to-day. My apron is put away, and I am tired."

"Well, then I am going alone!" said Janet; and with an air of great determination she left the room.



XVI

"The world is so full of a number of things
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."
—*Robert Louis Stevenson.*

"One half of the world does not know how the other half lives."
—*Common Saying.*

AS she stood a moment in the passage, glancing this way and that, she saw a narrow door in the wall under the eaves, which she had never noticed before. She went to it, opened it, and almost before she had time to think, found herself entering a long, rather dark hall, at the end of which was another door partly open.

"There, now!" said Janet to herself. "I *knew* there was another house inside of our house, and I am sure there are people too, for this hall is carpeted."

It had indeed a carpet so thick and soft that not a footfall could be heard upon it. Janet kept on until she reached the half-open door. There she stopped and looked in. She could see two or three rooms leading on one from another, all dimly lighted. In the nearest room, by an open fire, sat two little golden-haired girls in their night-gowns, playing cat's cradle.

"May I come in?" asked Janet, softly.

They sprang up instantly, very much startled, and yet smiling as if they were not afraid. One of them came forward, and taking Janet by the hand, led her in.

"You mustn't wake the family," she said, in a low voice, "but Claribel and I are very glad to see you. Come and sit by us. How do you happen to be awake and dressed at this hour? *We* could not sleep at all, Claribel and I, so we slipped out of bed and came here by the fire."

"The rain on the roof kept us awake," said Claribel, curling her toes up as she held them toward the fire, "and we thought we heard other noises. Rosabel and I often say we think there are other folks in the house, but papa and mamma and Prim only laugh at us. How *did* you come here in the rain, and who are you, and where do you live?"



TWO LITTLE GIRLS
PLAYING CAT'S CRADLE.

"Why, I live *here*, this is my father's house!" said Janet, "and I came through your door away at the end of the hall."

"There, now!" exclaimed Claribel. "Prim must have forgotten to lock it before he went to bed. Mamma said he would forget some time, but he has invented a new kind of lock, and nobody but himself knows how to turn the key, so papa trusted him."

"Do you ever go out by that door?" asked Janet, wondering how it could be that she had never seen these pretty children before.

"Oh! no, indeed!" replied Claribel. "We are not allowed. There is only an old lumber-room there. Even papa and mamma never pass that door, and they keep it locked."

"We have plenty of doors besides that," remarked Rosabel, contentedly.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Janet. "Our folks don't know you are living here at all! I wish Prue were here—she is my sister. What a pretty bed you have, and what a nice room this is! How many of you are there?"

"Why, we two, of course, and papa and mamma, little boy Ray, Aunt Pen, and our big brother Prim."

"What a nice number!" said Janet. "How I do wish Prue were here!"

"Go and call her," replied Rosabel.

"But first come out into the far room with me and get cream-cakes," said Claribel, taking Janet's hand in hers and leading her away.

"Bring me some cream-cakes, too!" were the words Rosabel sent after them, as she nestled down by the fire again.

"Step softly, so as not to wake anybody," whispered the little girl in the night-gown, as she took Janet through four rooms in succession. In each room stood a bed, and in every bed there was someone sleeping. Janet felt utterly bewildered. The rooms were all partially lighted, and the furniture, though very comfortable looking, was well worn, as if it had been in use for years.

"And there are things here that *never* could have come up our narrow stairs!" thought Janet.

At last they reached the farthest room, where there was a stove, and closets, and a white cat asleep in a chair. Claribel found a jar from which she helped herself liberally to cakes, filling Janet's hands as well as her own. The cakes were odd, but good, Janet decided, as she tasted one. There was certainly cream in them, and they seemed to melt

in the mouth. There were two covered baskets standing on the table.

"Those are for the picnic we are going to have next moonlight," said Claribel; and just then her foot hit the tongs, so that they fell with a ringing noise on the floor.

"What's that?" called a quick, clear voice from the next room.

"Only me, Aunt Pen! I'm out here getting cream-cakes, and there's a new little girl with me that's come to call."

"All right," said Aunt Pen; "keep quiet, and don't touch the raisins. You can invite the girl to the picnic."

"What's that?" asked a voice from the room beyond.

"Oh! only Claribel, with a little girl visitor, getting cream-cakes," answered Aunt Pen.

"What did she say, Prim?" asked a sweet, sleepy little voice.

"Claribel is eating cream-cakes and has company. Go right back to sleep, Ray!"

"Why, we have waked everybody up!" whispered Janet, in dismay.

"Never mind. They'll go to sleep again," said Claribel. "And I'm glad Aunt Pen *did* wake up,

because now you can come to our picnic, you and your sister Prue."

"Well, we will," said Janet.

The two children then softly made their way back through the row of sleeping-rooms, and found Rosabel nodding by the fire.

"I'm getting sleepy myself," said Claribel, "but I'll go through the hall with you, and you must be sure to come early next moonlight to the picnic."

Janet turned a little reluctantly from the pleasant room, making her way into the hall and back to the door by which she had entered. As soon as she passed through, it closed behind her, with a soft good-by from Claribel.



XVII

"Oh, if you could see *my* moon!"
—*Lowell's Letters.*

"Who felt the quaint light subtly shining in?
Who heard that other wind within the wind?"
—*Mrs. Piatt.*

JANET lost no time in telling the story of her great discovery to Prue. They debated with much interest the question where all those rooms could be, and in what business the father of the children was engaged

The rain had now ceased falling, and the girls were able to go out of doors in the afternoon to work in their flower-beds. Their pansies needed weeding, and their pink-roots were ready to be divided. As they worked they cast many a glance up at the sloping roof over the pantry, and at the window whose blinds were never opened.

"It must be dark in there," said Prue, thoughtfully.

"No, it isn't very dark," said Janet, "and if it were, they wouldn't care. They have gone to sleep."

That evening, as the Kanter girls' mother opened the house door, to look out before locking it, she saw that the wind had blown all the clouds away, and the sky was clear and blue. The moon was high, and its white light filled the garden so that she could tell one flower from another.

"It is a bright moonlight night," she said; "it is beautiful outside."

The Kanter girls exchanged glances, for they knew what they meant to do. They remembered that they were invited to a picnic.

When they went upstairs, they first put on their plaid aprons, and then, leaving their moon-lit room, they stepped into the passageway.

"Which side is the door?" asked Prue.

"This side," said Janet, and, turning to the left, she found the door, indeed, but could not open it. She tried it again and again.

"Prim has locked it," she said; and then she rapped as loudly as she dared, but no one came.

Meanwhile, Prue discovered a door on the other

side, at the right, and told Janet she saw a light shining through the crack.

"Is it locked?" asked Janet.

"Yes," said Prue, trying it, "but I am going to rap."

As she did so, they heard a soft shuffling step approaching, that suggested loose slippers, and the next moment a pleasant-faced old man opened the door. He had a bald head and a stoop in his shoulders. His spectacles were pushed up on his forehead, and in one hand he held a little shoe.

"Come in, come in," he said, cordially.

So the girls went in, and were surprised to find that the first room they entered was a cobbler's shop. Shoes lay around, both new and old, with pieces of leather and two or three lasts. The cobbler seated himself on his bench, and went to work on the little shoe, which needed a patch. He asked the girls what he could do for them.

"We want to find the house where Claribel—" began Janet, but Prue whispered,

"We are in the house now;" so Janet corrected herself, and said,

"Can you tell us where two little girls live, named Claribel and Rosabel?"

"Those are Mr. Barley's children," said a voice from the next room.

It was the cobbler's wife who spoke. She was a stout, short-waisted woman. She was very busy about something, the girls could not tell what, for she stood with her back toward them.

"Oh! yes," said the cobbler; "you have only to go through Mr. Mory's premises, and you will find yourselves at the Barleys' residence."

"You see," said Janet, in explanation, "we are invited to a picnic, and we don't want to be late."

"Just so," replied the cobbler. "Well, now, this is Master Ray's shoe I have been mending for that same picnic, and you may take it to him."

So Prue took the little shoe, and the cobbler, pointing out a distant door as the one for them to depart by, took up another shoe, and began pegging.

The Kanter girls, going through the door, found themselves at the foot of a long stairway, up which they ran eagerly, and at the top, seeing another door ajar, they pressed in, breathless and somewhat abashed, as they met the eyes of a grave old school-master—evidently a school-master—dressed in black broadcloth, who sat at a desk mending quill pens. The room was full of desks, but the seats were empty.

"Quietly, quietly, my children!" said the school-



master, "this is a holiday. Why have you come?"

"If you are Mr. Mory, will you please tell us the way to Mr. Barleys?" asked Janet.

"Go out by the opposite door, and you cannot miss it," he replied.

The girls thanked him, and crossed the schoolroom as quick as they could. Now, there was a stairway to go down, but that took only a moment, and then, *then* they were in the comfortable kitchen where Claribel had given Janet cream cakes, and where the white cat was still dozing in the chair.

No person was in sight, and no sound was to be heard, except now and then what seemed like a smothered sob in another room. The girls stole softly along, and in the third room they found little Ray on his bed, crying.

"Dear little Ray, don't cry!" said Janet. "Where's Claribel?"

"She's gone to the picnic, and everybody is gone," sobbed Ray.

"Oh! then we *are* late. But why didn't they take you?"

"My shoe went to be patched," said Ray, "and it hasn't come back, and I can't go barefoot. I *could* go barefoot, but papa won't let me."

"Well," said Prue, merrily, "you may go to the picnic now, and you need not go barefoot, for I have brought your shoe. The cobbler has just mended it."

The tears gave way to smiles as little Ray saw his shoe. He sprang up and put it on.

" I'm going ! " he said, catching up a small straw hat from a chair.

" Take us with you," said Janet ; " we are invited, but we are late."

" And now *how* will he go ? " she thought. " Will he go out into our part of the house and down our stairs ? "

But no ! He went to a window, opened it, and looked out.

" The ladder is here," he said, cheerfully. " Will you go first, or are you afraid ? "

" I'm not afraid," said Janet, " it looks like a very strong ladder."

" It looks like a very long ladder," said Prue.

But the girls had steady heads, and they had climbed ladders before now, so they crept out upon this one, first Janet, then Prue, and then little Ray.

As they went down they heard the clapping of hands, and when Janet reached the bottom, Claribel caught her in her arms.

" I am *so* glad ! " she exclaimed.

Then Prue reached ground, and Rosabel smiled upon her and took her in charge.

" What made you so late ? " asked Aunt Pen.

She was a tall lady with brisk movements and a pleasant smile.

Janet explained that they had been obliged to come by way of the cobbler's and Mr. Mory's premises.

"There now, Prim!" said Claribel, looking reproachfully at a boy who stood near by.

"I forgot, Claribel. Indeed I forgot," he said; "and besides the key was in my other pocket."

The picnic now was at its height. Janet and Prue joined in everything; they ran races, they played games, made grape-vine swings, and tossed balls. Meanwhile the older people laid a table-cloth on the ground near the pear-tree, and spread forth a feast of cream-cakes, cracked nuts, raisins, and other dainties.

When the children were called, Janet and Prue found plates set for them the same as for the others, and everything was delicious.

"I like a moonlight picnic," said Prue. All the family smiled upon her and told her she must come again.

Was it the moonlight that gave the charm? It streamed through the trees, it lay broad upon the grass, the garden flowers fairly shone in it, and there was a spell of peace and happiness upon all.

When it was all over, when the supper was finished, the games ended, and the moonlight picnic had come to a close, when Janet and Prue had said good-night to their dear new neighbors, and in their own room had laid aside their wonderful aprons, Prue said:

"Janet, you know their home is right within our home and nobody has realized it. Do you suppose their moonlight is within our moonlight, and their garden within our garden, in just the same way?"

"Maybe," replied Janet, briefly.

Then they made ready for bed, and said softly to each other, as their heads sank upon their pillows:

"How beautiful it has been!"

DOWN A LONG LONG STAIRWAY

XVIII

"Off talys, and tryfulles, many man tellys;
Sume byn trew, and sume byn ellis."

ONE day the Kanter girls were sent by their mother to Mrs. Wray's house, to return a borrowed pattern. They liked this errand, because it gave them the chance of a good play-hour with Ned and Susie Wray. So they set forth with light hearts and soon crossed the fields that lay between the two dwellings.

But this morning, as it happened, Ned and Susie were away from home, so the Kanter girls stood in the pleasant door-yard when their errand was done, a little disappointed and a little uncertain which way to turn. Mrs. Wray saw it, and said,

"If you like butternuts, girls, there are a plenty up in our garret on the floor, and you may get all you want. Susie keeps a stone there to crack them

on, but Ned brings them down to that big rock under the ash-tree."

"Oh! thank you," exclaimed Janet, "we do like butternuts."

"Yes, we do very much," said Prue.

"Not the main garret," said Mrs. Wray, as they turned toward the entry stairs, "but the garret over the kitchen. Turn to the right as you get to the top, through the low door, and that will take you down three steps into the kitchen garret. There's another way through the shed, but you don't want to go out there."

The Kanter girls went up the stairs as directed, and at the top opened the door on the right. It was just high enough for them, but a man would have had to stoop going through. They then went down three wooden steps into this little garret, which they had never seen before. Here bunches of herbs were hung, and the air was heavy with a mingled scent of catnip, mint, and pennyroyal. There was a spinning-wheel in one corner and a heap of dried sweet corn in another. On an old piece of canvas spread over the floor, a barrel of butternuts had been poured out, with Susie's stone and hammer lying close by. In the end of the garret was one cobwebby window through which the morning

sun shone in dusty lines, and by the window, in a low splint chair, sat a little old woman knitting. She held her work near her eyes, and only glanced up once as the girls opened the door. She wore a brown gown and a brown cap. Seeing that she paid no attention, the girls quietly gathered up a quantity of butternuts in their aprons. They had meant to crack them upstairs, but fearing to disturb the knitter, they now carried them down under the ash-tree.

"This is better too," said Prue, "because the shells won't make such a litter."

In their haste they had not taken butternuts enough, and were soon ready for more. They ran up the stairs, and as they opened the door again into the little garret, they saw the old woman just disappearing by another door behind the spinning-wheel.

"That's the way down into the shed," said Janet.

"Oh! she's left one of her needles!" exclaimed Prue, picking up a long shining steel. "Let us run after her with it."

They pushed in behind the wheel, opened the door, which was left a little ajar, and passing through, found themselves on a dark descending stairway, very narrow, and with very small steps. Janet went ahead and Prue followed carefully.



"THAT'S THE WAY DOWN INTO THE SHED," SAID JANET.

"I suppose the door at the foot of the stairs is shut," said Janet, "and that is what makes it so dark."

"I have a mind to wait till you get there and open it," said Prue.

"Oh! no, come right along," urged Janet, "we'll be out in the shed in a minute. I wish we had brought our nuts, so as not to go up again."

"Why don't we reach the bottom?" asked Prue, after a few moments, as they still descended the stairway, making a turn from time to time.

"I don't know," said Janet; "they are such little steps that maybe we think we get along faster than we really do."

"*I* believe they go into the shed cellar," remarked Prue, picking her way with close-gathered skirts.

"Perhaps they do," said Janet, cheerfully. "I wish we had counted the steps. I mean to begin now, though there cannot be many left. One, two, three, four—"

And so she went on, until at the twentieth, Prue, who began to feel timid, whispered,

"Let us go back!"

"Oh! no, hark! I hear someone just below. It is a boy whistling. Perhaps he is coming for the needle."

There surely were steps approaching, and soon a little light appeared, a tiny lantern, held by a boy who was groping his way upward. His brown clothes looked like dark leather, and his shaggy eyebrows met over his eyes, but his face was child-like and not unattractive. His brown cap rested on clustering, black, curly hair, and the little button at the top hung loose.

"You needn't come up any farther," said Janet, "we have brought the needle. How much longer are these stairs?"

"Twice as much again," said the boy, looking at them in amazement.

"Don't they lead into Mrs. Wray's shed?" asked Prue, looking over Janet's shoulder.

"They lead into my playhouse," said the boy.

"Oh! take us there, then!" exclaimed Janet; "we don't want to climb the stairs again, and we should like your playhouse, I know. When we have seen it we can go home."

Prue could not remember ever having seen a playhouse on the Wray farm, but she thought he might mean the grape-arbor, so she kept silence.

The boy turned and led the way downward, Janet and Prue following as best they could, for it really seemed better now to keep on than to turn

back. But, oh! the endlessness of it, down, down, down, with no variation, except that now and then the light disappeared for a moment and there was a corner to turn.

"How much farther is it?" asked Janet.

"Quarter as much again," said the little guide, speeding downward.

"Go slower," said Janet.

"I wish we *had* gone back," Prue began, but just then they came out on a landing, and the little boy waved his lantern and exclaimed,

"Now you are down, and here is my playhouse."

He guided them into a dimly lighted enclosure, where some low seats cut in the rock were all that the Kanter girls could see.

"I don't call this a playhouse," said Janet, "I call it a cellar."

"But maybe the family house is pleasant," said Prue, "and we want to give the old lady her needle. What is your name, boy?"

"Klein," he replied, soberly. He had expected them to praise his playhouse.

"That was my great-aunt who dropped the needle," he added, directly after. "We always tell her she will lose something, going up in that strange place to knit."

"Take us to her," said Janet, imperatively.

The boy nodded, and beckoned them to follow him through a roughly hewn passageway.

The Kanter girls now found themselves on a narrow road with walls of rock, and the light was like late twilight, but their eyes were becoming used to it, and they could see the little figure pushing steadily ahead with the button bobbing on his cap.

"He don't look quite like common boys," whispered Prue.

"No," answered Janet, "I don't think he is a common boy, but he may be a miner."

By this time they were in sight of a jagged archway. The boy went through it, and they heard him calling to someone. The Kanter girls followed, and found that the archway was the entrance to a dwelling. There was a fire inside, and a table set with a great many plates—as many as thirty, Prue thought, but she did not like to be seen counting. A short, brisk woman was stepping about, and in the chimney-corner sat the little great-aunt, still knitting, but with only three needles.

The unexpected appearance of the Kanter girls caused some excitement. The brisk woman dropped the skillet she was carrying, the great-aunt peered

anxiously over her work, and there were mysterious scuffling sounds in the darkest and farthest part of the room.

"They wanted to come, and I couldn't help it," said Klein, in a tone of self-defence.

"I did not wait to latch the door," sighed the great-aunt. "But they must not stay long, they must go home, or——"

"We have an errand," said Janet, quickly; "we found your needle, and came to bring it to you."

The great-aunt put out her hand to take the needle, but Janet stepped backward and continued to hold it.

"Thank you, child," said the great-aunt. "It is well that you have an errand. Now give me the needle and go home. It will take a long time to climb the stairs. And you, Klein, go with them and fasten the door."

"Who is that under the table?" asked Janet, abruptly.

Prue was surprised at Janet's inquisitiveness, but the great-aunt replied, in a mild voice,

"Klein's brother. Come out here, Heft!"

Out crept Heft, and stood in plain sight. He was smaller than Klein, but he looked older and more surly.

"Who is that behind the big chair?" asked Janet.

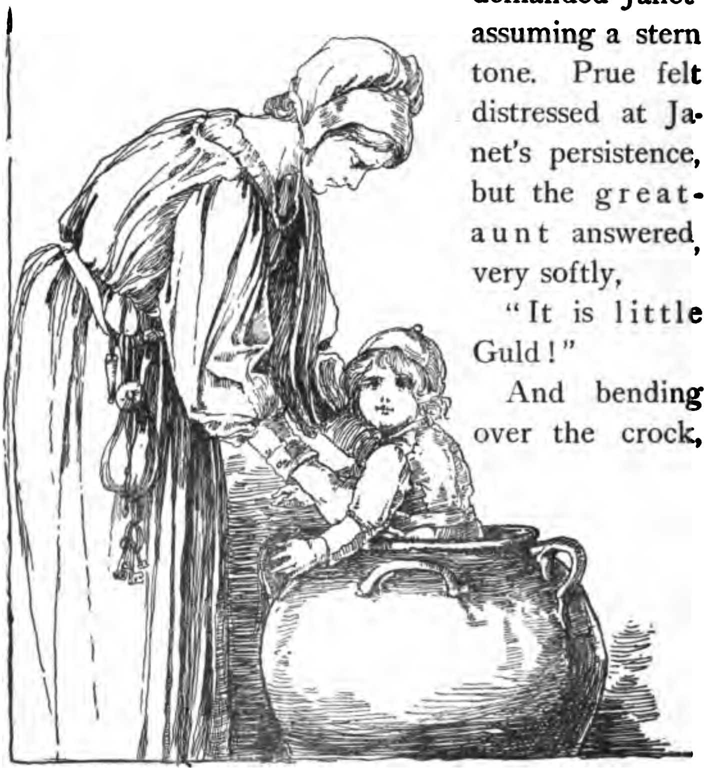
"Klein's sister, Mog," said the great-aunt, gently. "Come here, Mog!"

Mog came slowly forth, and stared at the Kanter girls from under her heavy eye-brows.

"*Who* is in that earthen crock behind you?" demanded Janet assuming a stern tone. Prue felt distressed at Janet's persistence, but the great-aunt answered, very softly,

"It is little Guld!"

And bending over the crock,



she lifted him out. He was smaller than any of the others, with shrewd eyes and warlike fists, but when Janet laughed, little Guld looked up at her and laughed back again.

Janet was no longer in doubt.

"I am so glad we have found you," she said, cordially. "You are kobolds, I am sure, and I suppose there are dozens more of you in those dark corners. We didn't know you were in the neighborhood."

"You won't mention it, I hope," said the brisk woman, uneasily.

The great-aunt laid down her knitting and asked in a trembling voice if Janet would not kindly give her her needle.

"Not yet," said Janet; and Prue, who had felt a slight alarm relieved only by the thought of the invisible ring in her pocket, now remembered what she and Janet had read about odd little people who live in strange corners of the earth, and who will do all in their power to oblige a person who has anything of theirs in his possession.

"We want to see the place, now we are down here," said Janet, "and you must guide us about and protect us. After that, I will give up the needle."

"I am too busy," said the brisk woman.

"I am too tired," said the great-aunt.

"*We* won't go!" said Heft and Mog.

But Klein said he would go if he could find the way, and little Guld said,

"Take me, and I will show you!"

So Klein took Guld upon his shoulder and led the way out, Janet and Prue following. They went along another road, and in the dim light the Kanter girls saw trees and walls and fields, with here and there a kobold digging the ground. It was like a landscape painted in sepia. Wherever the road divided, Guld pointed out to Klein the way he was to take. Here and there they saw a dwelling in the rocks, and surprised faces at the windows as they passed. The whole region was roofed over like one immense and continuous archway.

Little Guld

XIX

"I have not time to stay,
And yet I will."

—*Longfellow.*

"It would have been a pity for such a race to go extinct."
—*Thomas Hood.*

THEY came presently to a little stream which ran out of the rocks and trickled away into silence down a cleft. There was a bench near by, and Prue said:

"Let us sit down and rest."

Janet consented, for she wanted to look about her more. There was a turn ahead which cut off the view, but she could see a long way back down the road, and there were two moving specks in the distance.

"I am very glad you have stopped!" cried a kobold, running toward them from a stone hut a few rods away. His voice was thin and high-pitched,

but he tried to make it agreeable, and smiled as he spoke. Prue wished he wouldn't smile.

"Please lend me the needle a moment," he said to Janet. "My sister wants it while she turns a stocking-heel. It won't take her two minutes."

"I can't spare it," said Janet.

"Oh, do let me touch it!" he begged. "I want to see if it is sharp."

Janet did not answer, but Guld said quietly "Go!" and the kobold retreated.

By this time the two specks grew bigger and more distinct.

"I do believe that Mog and Heft are coming too," said Prue.

"I knew they would follow us," answered Klein.

"We are not going to sit here waiting for them," exclaimed Janet, springing up. "Aren't you rested, Prue?"

Prue was quite rested, and starting off again they were soon around the turn with a new stretch of road before them, wider and with a loftier roof and fresh signs of habitation.

As they drew near a dwelling somewhat higher in its situation than the rest, deeper recessed in the rock, and with a rough outer stairway leading up to its door, which stood open, they heard a woman's

voice inside singing. It was such a pleasant, cheery sound that the Kanter girls stopped to listen.

"Let us go in and visit her," said Janet.

"Oh! may we?" Prue asked Guld.

Guld hesitated, and Klein started to move on, but the Kanter girls would not follow.

"It will delay us too much," said Guld then in a low voice.

"Oh! *we* don't care," said Janet, twirling the needle lightly in her fingers.

"Very well," said Guld. "Go in, and make your visit. Klein and I will sit out here on the rocks until you come back."

Janet had at first half a mind to compel Guld to go with them, but as it occurred to her that perhaps she and Prue could talk more freely without listeners, she decided to leave him.

"Now remember, you are not to run away!" she called back when half way up the steps. Guld nodded soberly.

In another moment the Kanter girls stood before the open door and the woman within stopped her singing and said, quickly:

"Why, you dear little girls! Come right in! Who are you?"

Now it was like dusk outside, but the Kanter

girls having become used to it, they could see their way without any trouble. Inside this house, however, there was more light, something like very early dawn, and the woman's face was so bright and kind that Janet exclaimed :

"You are the very nicest kobold we have seen in all this country!"

"Now sit down in these two little stone chairs, and tell me your names," she said. As she spoke she opened the door into an inner room which was even lighter than the first and made everything plainer.

"Why, this seems almost like home," said Janet, "but out of the windows it is like black night."

"Have you lost your way?" asked the kobold woman. "If you have, I can help you."

"Oh, no!" said Janet. "We know the way perfectly as far as we have come. We are the Kanter girls, and we are just seeing the country. We are not afraid, and we can go back whenever we like because we have the great-aunt's knitting-needle."

So saying, she held it up to view.

"So you came by way of the great-aunt's," said the woman, thoughtfully. "You are quite right in keeping the needle. Tell me, did you see—but no, probably you did not! They are very careful."

"We followed Klein down the stairs. There were hundreds of steps!" said Janet.

"I suppose so," replied the woman, "my own road is much shorter and I could take you that way if you are ready to go home."

"Oh, no, we want to see everything we can down here first," said Janet. "But it is dim outside, and your rooms have light in them. What makes them light?"

The woman paused a second before replying, and then said, "The ceilings are high."

Prue looked up, away up, and it seemed to her that she saw light softly stealing down to meet her gaze. A silence fell upon them, which Janet broke, saying,

"We must go now. Guld will be tired of waiting."

"Guld! Little Guld!" exclaimed the woman. "My little Guld?"

"He is waiting for us with Klein," said Janet. "Do you want him? I will tell him to come in."

And running out down the steps, she called him. His back was toward her and he seemed not to hear. She went around in front of him and said, firmly,

"Guld, come in! That nice kobold woman

wants to see you. Come right in this minute!" And she tapped him on the shoulder with the needle.

"You can stay here, Klein," said Guld in a low voice, and then, rising, he himself went up the steps, and as the light from within fell on his face Janet, looking at him sharply, saw tears in his eyes. In the door stood the kobold woman with outstretched arms and Guld ran into them. She carried him inside, held him for a few moments, and then drawing forward a broad low chair from the corner placed him in it. The chair sparkled with bits of colored light as if set with gems.

"My own chair!" said Guld, contentedly. Prue thought of the crock, but was silent.

"Sing to me," said little Guld.

And the woman sang, in a sweet, clear, restful voice, sang a song of home and peace, and while she sang little Guld fell asleep, sitting in his chair.

"He must be tired," said Janet. "He isn't your boy, is he?"

"I had the care of him," replied the woman. "But by our laws, if he chose he could go from house to house. And he did choose."

"Maybe he will come back now," said Prue.



IN THE DOOR STOOD THE KOBOLD WOMAN.

As they watched him he awoke, stood up, and said, "I'm not sleepy! We must go now."

"Where are you going, Guld?" asked the woman.

"Along the highway," he replied. "These are my visitors and I have to guide them."

"Listen, little Guld," said she. "You may take these visitors into the grand hall where I went with you one day. You know the way."

Guld's face brightened. "Oh, that will be best of all!" he exclaimed. "And may Klein go?"

"Klein may, but no more. And tell me about it as you come back."

She stood at the door and watched them down the steps.

"How dim it is out here, after being in a light room!" said Janet. "I can hardly see you, Klein. What are you laughing at?"

"Why," replied Klein, "Mog and Heft have turned the wrong way! They looked this way and that, but I hid in the rocks and they didn't see me."

And he laughed again.

"Now we shall have to go after them," said Guld. "They may stray into the dens. But they

have not gone far yet. We will go back to the bend, and wait while you call them, Klein."

So they all walked back to the bend, and Klein, who had become very sober at the mention of the dens, called loudly,

"Mog, Mog! Come back, you and Heft!"

His voice rang down every turn. In a moment more they heard the sound of feet clumsily running, and then Mog and Heft appeared, two dark little figures coming out of the darkness.

"Is that you, Mog?" said Janet. "Were you trying to catch up with us?"

"Yes," said Mog. "Heft and I wanted to come too."

Prue looked at them and smiled, for their faces seemed pleasanter than when she saw them first. She wanted to tell them so, but hesitated as to how she should express it.

"We dipped our hands in the brook and splashed our faces," said Mog, complacently.

"That's good," said Janet, in an approving tone. "Prue and I do that every day."

"Not in *our* brook," said Heft, raising his heavy eyebrows.

"No, in our own brook," Janet replied, "close by where we live."

"Their brook may have something to do with ours," suggested Prue. "We may be going right under our own front yard now."

"That's true," said Janet, looking up, "and those gnarly black things overhead may be the roots of our apple-tree."

The children now walked on together, Klein and Guld ahead, the Kanter girls next, with Mog and Heft behind.

"This way," said Guld at length, pointing to a turn at the left.

XX

"Among the rocks his city was."
—*Robert Browning.*

AS they passed round the turn they heard a sound of hammering, and suddenly came into view of what seemed to be a workshop with great numbers of kobolds actively employed. Some were making bowl-shaped dishes, and some were cutting out blocks of stone. All the kobolds as they looked up at the visitors took off their caps to Guld.

"That's a pretty bowl," said Janet to the nearest kobold. "You grind out the inside, don't you? I didn't know bowls were made that way."

Mog and Heft were very much interested. They pressed up close to the kobold so as to watch him, and he gave them each a round stone and showed them how to grind. They went to work at once, and hardly noticed when Guld said to the kobold, "Keep them with you till we come back," and then beckoned the Kanter girls away.

After leaving this scene and making another abrupt turn, they came to a very narrow aperture, through which they went, bending low to avoid the rock overhead. Guld, whom Klein no longer carried, slipped quickly ahead as leader.

"Guld knows," said Klein, "but I have never been this way before."

"How comes Guld to know so much?" asked Janet, groping along in the dark behind Klein.

"Oh! he's the heir, he is going to be king. He is brought up to be a king, and he knows."

At this moment they came out into space and light, and found themselves in a magnificent cavern, paved with crystallized granite, and overhung with crystals, red, white, and purple. All around the walls were set hollowed stones crusted inside with crystals, and in each of these a light was burning. Every light was reflected again and again on roof and walls, so that the whole cavern shone with splendor.

"Oh! oh! how beautiful!" cried the Kanter girls.

Little Guld laughed joyously. The queer old look softened on his face, and he began to run about like a happy child. Janet, always ready for a frolic, proposed that they should run races over the

flinty floor. The track was chosen, and the Kanter girls and the two little kobolds stood side by side, ready for a start.

"One, two, three, off!" cried Janet, and away they flew.

Janet and Prue were light-footed and very quick in any race, but, run as swiftly as they might, little Guld always kept ahead, his eyes shining and his black hair tossing. Again and again they tried the race, but Guld always won.

"It is because he is brought up to be a king," said Klein, who came in last.

In the next race, as they sped along over the floor, Janet threw the knitting-needle off to the left with all her force, and it tinkled on the crystal as it fell.

Guld sprang after it, caught it up with an exultant cry, flew back to his place, and shot like an arrow to its mark, reaching the opposite wall just a second before Janet gained it.

"You *are* a king!" she exclaimed. "I almost wish you were our little brother."

"I can keep you both here now to be my sisters," said little Guld, lifting the bright needle like a sceptre. "You have lost your power to command me!"

"Oh! no," said Janet, composedly, "I pulled the

button off from Klein's cap when we were coming through the dark passage, and I have it here safe in my hand."

Klein looked at Guld and trembled, but little Guld, who was going to be a king, smiled instead of frowning.

"You are my guests," he said, "I should not have kept you."

But Janet felt safer with the button in her possession.

"Hark!" exclaimed Klein, "I hear other voices!"

They stood for a moment listening, and then Guld led the way up through a crevice in the wall, where they could climb by grasping the projections on each side, almost as if upon a ladder, until they reached a natural platform in the rocks, on which a small ray of light fell which was not of any candle, but the light of the dear bright sun in the heavens.

Now they could certainly hear voices, and all four listened intently. The sound was not more than six feet away. It was the Wray children talking together.

"What a beautiful grotto this is!" said Susie Wray. Janet and Prue recognized her voice at once, although they could not see her.

"I knew you would like it," said Ned. "We can bring moss to carpet it, and keep some of our things here."

"I wish the Kanter girls could see it," said Susie.

"We will bring a lunch to-morrow and invite them to come with us," replied Ned.

"We will come! We will come!" the Kanter girls called out eagerly.

"Where are you!" exclaimed Ned, looking up and down in every direction.

"In behind the rocks! Oh! Guld, do let us get out here! Can we?"

Little Guld hesitated. He would have liked a longer visit from these merry playmates, but he was to be a king, and after a moment he said,

"Come, Klein, and help me move the gate. It has not been stirred in a hundred years."

With all their strength the little kobolds pushed on a block of granite before them, and it turned as if upon a pivot. In rushed the light and air, and the Kanter girls hastily made their way through the opening out into the rounded nook which the Wrays had discovered that morning and called a grotto.

"Good-by!" said little Guld.

"Good-by!" said Klein, and the block of granite began slowly to turn back again.

"Oh! Janet, Klein's button!" cried Prue, and catching it from her sister's hand, she hastened to put it through the small opening that was still left, into a little brown hand.

"Good-by, dear kobolds!" she said, and then the rocks closed so tightly that, search as they might, neither the Wrays nor the Kanter girls could find a crack or seam.

But they had the grotto and the sunshine, the green trees, the blue sky, and their favorite friends, and these made them happy, although for a moment Janet did regret that Prue had been so particular about returning the button.

An Arctic Expedition

XXI

> "Where the ermine hunters
> On their far journeys go,
> Where the reindeer sledges speed
> Over the wastes of snow."
>
> —*Mary Howitt.*

"NOW," said Prue, one day, "let us go and visit those dear little Fur-children again."

Janet was very willing. Their mother consented, but told them they must wear their stout plaid aprons over their woollen dresses, and she herself buttoned up their fur coats, and put on their fur hoods and mittens. Then she kissed their rosy upturned faces, and let them run away to call their chariot.

They stood side by side on the doorstep and waited, while the great green birds came sweeping gracefully down, with the pretty golden chariot. Then they climbed in and gave the word of command.

"To the cold country where houses are built of ice and snow."

The chariot rose in the air and sped swiftly along.

"Now we are over the rough land where the stunted pines grow," said Prue, looking down.

"And oh! now the snow is beginning," cried Janet; "and just then I saw some seals."

A few moments later, the green birds swept down and alighted in the snow, in the midst of the little settlement. The Fur-children came running out with cries of joy to welcome their young playmates, who, they said, had come at the best possible time, for their fathers had just returned from a walrus hunt, and now they could all have lumps of fat as big as their heads.

"And my mother has dressed two dolls for you!" said little Brenda. "They are cut out of bone, like ours, and dressed in fur."

"And I have brought something for Polo," said Janet, handing a box to the little black-eyed boy.

Polo opened it, screamed, and tumbled backward into the snow, looking like a round ball of fur. It was a Jack-in-the-box that Janet had given him, and it looked so much like a bear, it was no wonder that it scared him.

The birds and chariot now disappeared, and the Kanter girls were left with their fur-clad friends.

"We have come to play," said Prue, "and I'm so glad it's day-time." She glanced at the sun, which was in sight, though it hung low in the sky. From the snow-huts the women now peeped forth and nodded kindly to the children, but the men paid no attention; they were busy cutting up walrus.

"Let's play hide-and-seek!" proposed Janet; and taking little Brenda, she hid behind a snow-bank, while Prue made the others cover their eyes. It did not take long for them to learn the game, and they shouted, laughed, and tumbled merrily about. Presently it was the turn of Janet and Prue to hide, and they ran into a deserted snow-hut, which was almost in ruins. There they crouched behind a block of ice, but Polo soon spied them, and, full of mischief, rolled a huge snowball against the little low entrance, walling them in completely. The other children stood by and watched him, half laughing and half scared. But Janet and Prue were not at all dismayed.

"Let's play a trick on them," said Janet. "You have brought your invisible ring, haven't you, Prue? I have mine, and we will put them on. They won't dare to leave us here always, and when they

roll the door open, they will be so frightened they will not know what to do."

So the girls put on their rings, and it happened just as Janet had said. Polo wondered why they made no noise, and why they did not try to come out. Then Brenda began to cry a little, so at last he rolled the big snowball away and looked in.

"Why, that's queer!" he said; "I'm sure I shut them in here, but now they are gone, and there is nowhere they could get out."

"Oh!" wept little Brenda, "you've killed them, you bad boy, and we never shall see them again!"

At this, Polo pushed resolutely into the hut, and searched every nook and cranny; but it was too true, the pretty little strangers were not there, and he began to be afraid he *had* killed them in some mysterious way.

Brenda ran to tell her mother, who now came out from her hut, and assisted in the search, but all in vain. Her round, pleasant face grew very sober, as she said,

"It was wrong to shut them up so, they are not strong and hardy like us; some terrible thing has befallen them."

She returned sadly to her hut, followed by the bewildered, grieving children, when, suddenly, she

espied a movement in the warm, heavy, black fur coverlid on her couch. She lifted it, and behold! there were the Kanter girls, safe and sound, and laughing merrily.

You ought to have seen the Fur-children! They stopped crying, and stared, without a word to say for themselves, while Janet and Prue, still laughing, sprang up and hugged little Brenda. Polo rubbed his eyes and shook his head, he could not understand the way things had turned out at all.

"Let's make a snow-house now!" said Janet, leading the way out with all the rest after her.

Building a house is always fun, whether you do it with blocks in the nursery, or stones by the roadside, or snow up in the Arctic regions. There was a hill covered deep with snow, directly back of the settlement, and at the foot of that the children began their house. They heaped and piled the snow up all around, till they had enclosed a spot about ten feet and three inches square, and they built their walls as high as the upstretched hands of the tallest ones could reach, and there they stopped

"The sky will do for a roof," said Prue, looking up and thinking it was the bluest, most beautiful sky she ever saw.



"THE SKY WILL DO FOR A ROOF," SAID PRUE.

"Now let us make some snow-children," said a little Fur-girl named Meemee.

One word was enough. The little hands, in their fur mittens, all became busy again at once, and there never was any snow so easy to mould, Janet thought, as she shaped a plump, little figure with a round head. She patted its cheeks, gave it a dimple, and a tip-tilted nose, and then turned to see how Prue was getting along,

"Oh! how pretty yours is!" she exclaimed. Prue's snow-figure was just done, and it was, indeed, very pretty, with quite a natural droop of the shoulders and a dainty poise of the head.

"And, oh! what a cunning little one Brenda has made!" Janet went on, turning around, "and Polo's image has a really mischievous face. Now let us all stand off and have a good look at them. Aren't they white and pretty, and a great deal nicer than dolls?"

The Home of the Snow Children

XXII

"Ah, happy day, refuse to go!
Hang in the heavens forever so!"
—*Harriet Prescott Spofford.*

"A beautiful race were they, with baby brows,
And fair bright locks, and voices like the sound
Of steps on the crisp snow."
—*Bryant.*

NOW, up in this northern country, where the days were six months long, it was of course hard to keep track of the days of the week. But it was really Thursday, and Janet and Prue, who had quite forgotten the plaid aprons which were hidden so completely by their fox-skin cloaks, suddenly saw one of the snow-children smile, yes, actually *smile*, at them. Then moving toward a door, which was now for the first time visible,

and which stood slightly ajar, the snow-child beckoned to them invitingly.

"Oh! Janet, Janet," cried Prue, "it is Thursday! How glad I am! I do believe they are going to let us play with them."

But Brenda, crying out that her little snow-girl had fallen against the wall, ran to set her up in her place again.

"Don't, Brenda!" said Janet, "the snow-girl is only leaning against the wall, while she waits for us to come. Oh, Prue, what shall we do? You and I can go through that doorway, and I do want to see what is in there so very much; but the Fur-children cannot go, they do not see her beckon, and they don't know what it means. I wish we could take them too."

"I wish Brenda could go," said Prue. "I mean to lift up my cloak and let Brenda take hold of the corner of my plaid apron, and if she holds it tight enough, maybe she can go with me."

"Well, try it," said Janet; "if we can get her in, we can get them all in."

So Prue called Brenda, and showing her the apron under her cloak, told the little girl to keep hold of it with her hand. In that way the two children went through the open door together.

The little snow-children all ran after them at once. Prue stepped back to the doorway to speak to Janet.

"I took Brenda in as easily as could be," she said, eagerly; "and oh, Janet, it is perfectly lovely here. Make haste, and bring Meemee and Polo and the rest. I think we can lead in everyone of them."

So Janet took Meemee and Polo, one on each side of her, each holding a corner of her apron, and they stepped together through that strange, wonderful doorway, which they now saw plainly, and which led into the side of the hill. Then Prue took a dear little boy named Henjee, who was covered almost to the tip of his nose with brown fur. But the other children grew frightened at seeing their playmates disappear so suddenly in what looked to them like a blank white wall, and they scampered away as fast as they could go, losing all the pleasure.

The door was now closed. Janet and Prue looked around them in wonder and delight. The room in which they found themselves was carpeted with snowflakes so large that they could trace the crystalline pattern perfectly, and the walls and ceiling were of dazzling white snow. It seemed to be a dining-room, for there was a large snow-table in

the middle, with snow-chairs about it, and set with a dinner-service which looked like white Parian, but which was really made of snow, pressed firm and hard and thin like china, by some process known only to the makers of it.

The little snow-children who had been dancing gleefully about, now, in sweet, merry, flute-like voices, said,

"Come and eat with us."

The little one with dimples in her cheeks, came up to Janet, and led her to a chair, which was as easy as any dining-room chair ever is, Janet said afterward. Then all the rest were seated. The Fur-children were not yet used to things, and sat in a sort of dazed quiet, taking whatever was offered them, but Janet and Prue were not afraid to talk, and the snow-children chattered like so many bells ringing together.

Such a feast as that was! The snow-children waited on their guests, uncovering one dish after another. The dishes had been covered to keep the nice things in them fresh and cold until served. Janet waited eagerly for the first thing to be laid on her plate, and as soon as she tasted it, she said softly to Prue,

"Isn't it delicious!"

It was a slice from a splendid, large turkey that lay upon the principal platter, and it tasted like *nougat.* The snow-boy who carved it cut it in slices with perfect ease, as one would cut bread, without regard to bones or anything else. There were things that looked like bones in it, but they tasted like almonds.

The bread was nicer than the most delicate cake, and the children spread it with a sweet, white jelly instead of butter. The potatoes melted in the mouth like cream-candy, and the cakes were frosted to the last degree, and crisp as icicles. Wonderful cooks, to be sure, they must have had among the snow-people. There were white bowls set around the table for the children to drink from, and as Janet and Prue sipped and sipped, they whispered to each other that it was like sweet-flavored cream. When their bowls were empty they took their spoons, as they noticed the snow-children did, and scraped the inside. It was well they did so, it was the proper way, for the bowls were inch-deep all around the inner surface with the finest ice-cream.

"Seems like digging out a snow-cocoanut, doesn't it?" whispered Prue; "I believe these *are* their kind of cocoanuts!"

If the dinner tasted good to Janet and Prue,

what must it have been to the Fur-children, who were in the habit of eating nothing but walrus-fat and bear's meat? Polo ate as though he thought he should never have such a chance again in his life, but poor little Henjee, who was bashful, managed to spill his bowl of cream on his brown fur suit, and as it became frozen immediately, he had to wear it like a white stripe down his side the rest of the day.

"Do take more! do take more!" urged the friendly snow-children, coming again and again with dainties. But Prue said, in an undertone, to Janet, that they ought not to appear greedy, so after that they replied each time,

"Not any more, thank you!"

"Now come and play with us," said the snow-children when dinner was done, and they ran ahead and opened another door, through which their guests followed them into a large, beautiful play-room, with the walls and ceiling of snow, as before; but instead of the long table, there were the greatest number of pretty toys, all made of snow.

One little snow-boy sprang upon a rocking-horse, and laughed as he made it gallop. The youngest little snow-girl picked up a lovely snow-dolly and handed it to Brenda, who was almost afraid to

touch it for fear it would fall to pieces, but it did not.

Prue found a kaleidoscope, containing crystals of snow and ice, which changed about, as she turned it, in a wonderfully pretty fashion; while Janet fastened a drum to Henjee's fur-clad figure, and showed him how to be a drummer-boy.

There was a small snow-sledge which Polo dragged about in great glee, giving Meemee a ride upon it.

"Ho!" he said, "I am as strong as two reindeer!"

The little snow-children ran around among the rest, clapping their hands and laughing, they were so pleased with their strange, funny guests, who were not white like them, and who made so much more noise than they did, but who were so friendly and good-humored.

In The Snow Garden

XXIII

> " And then, when the rare hoar frost would come,
> 'Twas like a dream of wonder,
> Above us grew the crystal trees
> And the crystal plants grew under."
>
> —*Mary Howitt.*

> " All seemed wrought
> Of stainless alabaster, up the trees
> Ran the lithe jessamine, with stalk and leaf
> Colorless as her flowers."
>
> —*Bryant.*

"I AM going to call you Lily," said Prue to one dear little snow-girl who hovered about her.

"I like that name," said the child, her eyes sparkling. "I wish you would stay here with me always."

"You must come and visit *us* some time," said Janet, hospitably. " But please, won't you tell me if that is a door I see over yonder in the snow wall?"

"Yes," said the little snow-girl; "come and look

in when I open it, and you will see our sleeping-room."

Janet and Prue crossed the white floor with her, and she showed them the room fitted up daintily with two rows of little white beds, made up with the snowiest of pillows and spreads. It was very pretty, and they said so, but the play-room had more attractions for them.

Henjee and Meemee had found some blocks, tiny little brick-shaped blocks of ice, and they were building with them on the snowy floor. But instead of building houses and churches, as the Kanter girls would have done, they made little round huts, such as their parents lived in.

"Now let's play tag!" said Janet, who was restless; and, telling all the others to run, she chased them about merrily, making the air fairly dusty with snow. She tagged Brenda first of all, and then the little Fur-girl in her turn chased the rest. But the snow-children flitted about so swiftly that they were never caught at all, and a new door opening suddenly on the farther side of the room, they went whirling out as if the wind had blown them.

"Come! come! come into the garden with us!" they called, looking backward over their shoulders.

Janet caught Brenda and Polo by the hand, and



ran out, followed by Prue, who led little Meemee and Henjee.

"Oh! how lovely!" cried Janet; "see the trees, and the apples hanging on them!"

"See the dear little snow-flowers!" said Prue,

who found herself walking in a path between beds full of lilies, and asters, and violets; but they had no color nor perfume—they were all of the purest snow. The trees were snow and the apples were snow, as Polo found when he picked one and bit it.

There was a wall of snow all around the garden, and a gate in the wall, which stood temptingly ajar, but no one noticed this circumstance at first.

"Don't you have any birds?" asked Prue, who thought the apple-trees would furnish very nice places for nests.

"We had some this morning," said the dimple-cheeked snow-girl. "They must have flown away. Let's make some more!"

And immediately the snow-children fell to work, gathering up snow in their hands, and shaping little fat birds with short legs, which as soon as they were set down, began to hop about, as lively as possible.

"Oh! how funny!" cried Janet, laughing until the tears came into her eyes. "Now what *would* happen if I should take up some snow and make a cat?"

"Oh! don't!" said Prue; but Janet, full of mischief, had already begun, and in a few moments she had moulded an unmistakable cat, only he had no whiskers, and his tail was too long. She put

him down and watched him. He saw the birds instantly, and making a spring, caught one in his mouth.

"Oh! oh! oh!" wailed the snow-children in a chorus, wringing their little white hands.

"It's *too* bad!" exclaimed Prue, who was very tender-hearted.

"Scat! scat!" cried Janet, clapping her hands at the cat and rushing toward him. He started off on a run, and jumping over the wall, disappeared from sight.

"There! I hope that is the last of *him!*" she said, feeling rather ashamed of herself.

Just at that moment, Polo, who had ventured near the partly opened gate, uttered a loud scream and fled across the garden. The cause was evident, a huge white bear was just pushing his way in, and there was the wildest consternation among the children, who ran in all directions to save themselves. Janet and Brenda tried to find the playroom door, but instead found themselves pushing in vain against the great snow wall.

Prue was running, but suddenly remembered Henjee, and looking back, saw the poor little fellow sprawling in the snow. She helped him up, and then there was Meemee stumbling, so she helped her

up too, and plodded along with them both as well as she could, fancying she heard the bear breathing close behind her.

"Come! come! Follow us in here!" cried the snow-children, who had opened the play-room door, and at last they got all their little guests, one after another, in there again together and uninjured, and the door was shut in the bear's face. He pushed against it a few times, and then trotted quietly away.

"Oh! how my heart beats!" exclaimed Janet. "He would have killed us if he could!"

"He has chased us before," said the snow-children, "and he has never hurt any of us yet, but we are always afraid of him."

"I should have shut the gate if I had seen it was ajar," said the tallest snow-girl, "and then he could not have got in."

"Janet," said Prue, who was still trembling, "don't you think we had better go now? I am sure it must be almost Friday morning, and we don't know what *would* happen if we staid till then!"

"Yes, we must go now," said Janet. "Come, Brenda and Polo and Meemee and Henjee. Your fathers have cut the walrus all up by this time."

So, although the pretty snow-children begged and entreated them to stay longer, the little guests declined as politely as they could, and passed back through the dining-room out into their own snow-walled house with the blue sky roof. They must have been just in time, it must have been the very last flying moment of Thursday, for no sooner had they fairly stepped on their own ground than the door through which they had just come vanished completely, and there stood all the snow figures they had made, white and motionless as at the very first.

But Polo, who wanted more play, declared he should take the snow-children home with him, and although the Kanter girls begged him not to do so, fearing some harm would follow, he insisted upon dragging two of the figures away to his father's hut.

He pulled them through the low entrance and showed them to his mother. She was just trimming her lamp, which was nothing but a wick floating in a bowl of oil.

"I don't want all that snow in here," she said, roughly.

There was nothing for Polo to do but to put the figures out again, and he did this so clumsily that each of them lost an arm. Losing all his interest

in them, he left them lying on a snow bank, and went back into the hut to devour his supper of walrus-fat.

"Isn't that too bad!" said the Kanter girls, who came up a few minutes after and saw the prostrate figures. "We must put them right back where he found them, or maybe they will perish."

So, with Brenda's help they carried the poor little snow-figures back into the snow-house, and stood them up among their companions. By this time Brenda was yawning, she was so tired, and the Kanter girls themselves did not care to play any longer.

"Let's go home," said Janet, "I am sure mother must be expecting us by this time."

So they called for their chariot, and the birds made such good speed that in ten minutes Janet and Prue were toasting their feet before the fire in their mother's kitchen, and eating hot biscuits and honey which she had all ready for them.



XXIV

" And on the whole I like it greatly."

—*Longfellow.*

" I wonder if this is the wolf that ate
Little Red Ridinghood!
O, no!
That wolf was killed a long while ago."

—*Longfellow.*

BUT, in spite of the bear, the Kanter girls found, when they talked over their adventures, that they were quite ready to repeat them.

"I meant to have looked all around to see if there were any more doors," said Janet, regretfully. "There may have been other rooms more wonderful still—and where do you suppose the kitchen was?"

"There must have been a snow-mama somewhere," said Prue. "Maybe she tells them stories, sometimes. I mean to ask Lily, if we go there again."

"Was the bear *very* fierce?" asked the children's mother, who sat at a table near by with her mending.

"Mother," said Janet, eagerly, "he only chased us as a big, burly dog might, and if I had had a stick to hit him with, I think he would have crumbled all into bits of snow. Let's go again, Prue!"

"Yes," said Prue, "and let's carry presents. I'll take them some strawberries."

"And I will carry my canary," said Janet, "to show them what a bird can be. But I shall bring it home with me again."

"Carry it in the little wooden cage that it first came in," advised their mother, "and throw something over it for warmth."

It was the morning of the Thursday after their first visit. The chariot was summoned, and they departed, waving a good-by to their smiling mother. The birds by this time knew their way so well, that it was not five minutes before the Kanter girls were running over the crisp snow between the huts, calling for their playmates. Polo's father had been out hunting, and had killed a fine, large bear, and all the people in the settlement were having a great feast of bear's meat. But Brenda and Polo,

with little Meemee and Henjee, were soon ready to stop eating, and play with the Kanter girls.

"It may not be quite Thursday yet in this country," said Janet, looking at the sun, which remained just so high and told no tales, "but we will go to our snow-house and be ready."

Even if Thursday had begun, however, Janet expected to find the snow-figures just where she had left them, but when she entered the cold, lonely playhouse there was not a snow-child there—they had all gone. The Kanter girls soon found the door, which stood slightly ajar, and giving the Fur-children a corner of the plaid aprons to hold as before, they pressed into the dining-room, which you may be sure none of them had forgotten. But this time the table was cleared; if there had been any feasting, it was over, and there was not a snow-child in the room. So they went on into the next room, and there they found, in a corner, two little snow-children weeping.

"Oh! what is the matter?" asked Prue, who was at their side instantly. They looked up and said, in a sad voice,

"Our brothers and sisters are playing in the garden, but we cannot go, because we have each lost an arm."

"Oh! what a shame!" exclaimed Janet, with a reproachful glance at Polo, who hung his head in confusion.

"Maybe we could mend it," said little Brenda, "with some of the snow in the garden."

The snow-children brightened at this, and one of them said, gratefully,

"No one has thought of that before!"

So, all together, they went out into the garden, and although they heard the voices of the other snow-children in merry play on the other side of some shrubbery, they did not go to seek them until the kindly work was done. Polo gathered a quantity of soft white snow, and the Kanter girls made two nice little arms, which they set against the snow-children's shoulders, and they grew fast at once, as good arms as before. Then the snow-children were happy again; they danced and laughed for joy, and ran round the shrubbery, followed by their guests, to join the other children, who welcomed them gladly.

"I have brought you some strawberries," said Prue, producing her basket and dividing the berries all around. She watched the snow-children eagerly, as they ate them, for she hoped the berries would make their lips pink. It seemed



JANET HUNG THE CAGE ON A TREE.

as if they did, just a little, but she was not quite sure.

"I have brought my canary to visit you," said Janet, showing the small wooden cage that she held in her hand. The children crowded close around her, and at that very moment the canary began to sing, sweet and clear, a perfect gush of melody. At the sound, there came hopping from the shrubbery and from all parts of the garden, the funny, little, fat snow-birds, who did not know what music meant. Janet hung the cage on a tree, and the snow-birds stood beneath in rows like little scholars, listening. Pretty soon there was a peeping and a chirruping among them.

"They'll learn to sing now!" said Janet, much pleased.

But while the children all stood around, watching, there was a sudden gust of wind that blew some of the snow-leaves to the ground, and it must have blown the gate open too, for there was immediately the sound of something rushing, and a wild, fierce growl which made the children flee at once.

"The were-wolves! the were-wolves!" they screamed, bursting open the playroom door, and running inside. They all succeeded in getting safely into the room, except that Polo, who was

last, had a piece of his fur coat torn off by one of the savage white beasts.

"They cannot touch us now!" said the snow-children, when the door was shut tight.

"I think I will take little Meemee and Henjee home," said Brenda, and although the Kanter girls begged her to stay as long as they did, she was firm, and leading the small Fur-children, who clung to her for protection, she departed, the heavy snow-doors closing softly behind her as she went. But Polo staid, he meant to see all that Janet and Prue saw.

"Let's play hide-and-seek!" proposed Janet, wishing to bring back a cheerful state of things. So they began a game which soon grew very merry. It was presently the turn of the Kanter girls, Polo, and the child Lily to hide, and the rest of the snow-children ran into the dining-room to wait for the call. Polo had a place already in his mind, and he at once hastened to it. It was in the bed-room.

"Can you take us somewhere that we have never been before?" asked Janet, coaxingly, as she took little Lily's white hand in hers.

The snow-child hesitated a moment, and then said,

"Yes, follow close behind me!"



XXV

> " The white walls widened and the vault
> Swelled upward like some vast cathedral dome."
>
> —*Bryant.*

LILY raised a soft, snowy curtain, which Janet and Prue had not seen before, and disclosed a little narrow door, like a panel in the wall, which she opened. The three slipped through quickly, the door closed fast behind them, and the Kanter girls stood for a moment bewildered. A great sense of space smote upon them, and the air seemed colder than before, and the light dimmer.

"Come quick," said the snow-child, "we must hide!"

And she led them swiftly over the icy floor to a

small nook in the wall, where they crouched down out of sight. Afar off they could hear the merry voices of the snow-children, who were running hither and thither searching for them, but no one opened the narrow door, no one peeped into this vast, strange, silent hall.

"The roof is almost as high as the sky," whispered Prue, "and it glitters like the prisms of chandeliers."

"Those are icicles hanging down," said Lily, "if it wasn't for them it would be almost dark here."

"I don't believe they will ever think of coming in here for us," said Janet, "and that floor of ice looks so nice I want to run and slide on it. Let's do it."

She started off as she spoke and took a long, beautiful slide that carried her to the middle of the hall. Prue followed her at once. The snow-child Lily seemed reluctant to join them at first, and when she did so, cast a timorous glance now and then over her shoulder. But this wore off, and soon they were all three gliding and sliding swiftly in every direction like little spirits, they were so noiseless.

"Now I must rest," said Janet, when quite out of breath.

"What *is* this place?" asked Prue of the snow-child.

"It is the King's hall," she said softly; "we are not allowed to come here, but the King is on a journey, and no one will know."

"What would happen if anyone *did* know?"

While Prue was asking this question, Janet had discovered a new wonder, something that looked like huge organ-pipes all in a row like so many icicles, and she began to search about for the keys.

"Stop! stop!" cried the snow-child, flying toward her, but it was too late. Janet had already struck the strange ice-keys, and some sweet but discordant notes sounded through the hall. Instantly a wide door swung open, letting in a freezing blast, and an enormous snow-ball was precipitated into the hall.

"The Chamberlain! the Chamberlain!" shrieked the snow-child, in the wildest terror.

The ball immediately turned toward them, and now the Kanter girls could see that it had eyes and nose and mouth. It came rolling nearer to them—at least Janet said afterward it either rolled or turned somersaults, and if it turned somersaults it must have had little short legs and arms too small to be seen. But it *looked* as if it rolled. The nearer it came the more alarming it appeared, and

the children in great fright ran to escape it. They ran as fast as they could, but they could hear it thumping, thumping, close behind them all the time, and muttering in an angry manner.

"Hide in here!" panted the snow-child, darting into a recess in the wall which none of them had seen before. The Kanter girls followed her in haste. This refuge was about as large as a pew in a church, and the best of it was that the entrance was too narrow for the Chamberlain to come in after them, for he was as much as four feet across.

He rolled up with a puff and a thump, and tried to push in, but wedged himself tight in the entrance. Luckily he was right side up.

"Shameful! shameful! shameful!" he said, in a deep bass voice.

The children crouched together in the farthest part of the recess. The Kanter girls had not once thought of their rings, and if they had they would not have deserted poor Lily, who was much the most frightened of the three, and who lay in a little palpitating heap on the icy floor.

"He'll grow tired and go away presently," thought Janet, "if it is only a question of waiting we can stand it as long as he can, for he must be very uncomfortable."

But hardly had she thought this, when his eyes suddenly closed, his great snow-mouth opened in a yawn, and there he was, sound asleep.

"Now he looks more like a snow-ball than ever," said Janet. "Oh! Prue, how long do you suppose snow-balls sleep? He may not wake up for a year, and we shall starve."

"Or we may go to sleep ourselves," said Prue, "and be like Rip Van Winkle when we wake up, and be grown women, maybe."

"We might roll him out," suggested Janet.

"There, he moved a little," whispered Prue.

And in a moment more the Chamberlain slowly opened his eyes again, stared about him in a drowsy, surprised manner, as if trying in vain to remember something. Then releasing himself from his cramped position, he rolled away, muttering,

"It's half an hour past bed-time!"

"He's forgotten us!" whispered the Kanter girls, joyfully, and when the thump, thump died away in the distance, they aroused the snow-child and came out of their prison.

"And now we had better get out of the King's hall as quick as we can," said Janet, "I wouldn't have gone in if I had known it was against the rule. The children must have stopped looking

for us, I have not heard their voices for a long time."

But it was of no use their trying to find the little narrow door through which they could pass into the playroom again, for the solid white wall of snow showed not the slighest trace of a crack or hinge or latch or keyhole. They searched on every side, passing their hands up and down the wall, but all in vain. Even the snow-child looked thoroughly bewildered and dismayed.

"Well!" exclaimed Janet, leaning against the wall to rest herself, "I think—mercy! what's that?"

She had leaned with all her weight against the very door itself without knowing it, and as it suddenly gave way behind her, she fell backward on the playroom floor, just as she exclaimed "Mercy! what's that?"

"I don't care, I'm glad of it!" she said, as she picked herself up, for now they were all in the playroom again, and safe from the Chamberlain.

"But where are the snow-children and Polo?" asked Prue. "Oh! Janet, I do believe we have staid past the time, and it is Friday, and we cannot get out for a whole week!"

But Janet said she did not care, she wanted more

adventures, and they had Lily for company, and when they were tired they could sleep in the pretty snow-beds.

" Only I don't believe I ever *can* be sleepy," she added laughingly, " in a country where the sun doesn't go down. Come, let us run out into the garden."

CAUGHT IN A SNOW-STORM

XXVI

"Safe on a snow too far, too high,
For scent of dogs or feet of men,
The shepherd watched the clouds sail by
And dreamed and sang again."

—*Helen Hunt Jackson.*

THEY found plenty to do in the garden for a time, weeding out all the hailstones that had fallen in among the asters and violets. The little snow-birds hopped about them, twittering very sweetly, and the canary still sang in the white apple-tree. But after awhile Janet noticed that the garden gate had swung open, and she went thither at once.

"Oh! Prue," she exclaimed, "come right here and look at the lovely snow-fields, and that nice path! Let us go out there and take a walk!"

"Oh! no, no!" said Lily, shuddering. "The were-wolves may chase you!"

But Janet was wilful. There were no wolves in

sight over all that expanse of glittering snow, and if any *did* appear, why, she and Prue had invisible rings in their pockets, and they *wanted* adventures. So they started off, leaving Lily looking disconsolately over the gate.

They walked hand in hand, with the low sun shining pleasantly in their faces, two little figures crossing a wilderness of snow.

"I didn't know but we might see some snow-cows and dear little snow-calves," said Prue.

"*I* thought we might see squirrels or rabbits," said Janet. "There! what's that?"

From the other side of a snow-hillock there suddenly appeared, coming toward them, a strange animal with an extremely long tail dragging after him.

"Oh! Janet, it's that cat you made," cried Prue.

"Well, cat, how do you do?" asked Janet, coolly.

"You should have made me whiskers," said the cat, in a reproachful voice.

"I forgot them, and besides I *couldn't* make them," answered Janet. "What do you want them for?"

"I can't go through holes," whined the cat. "I get my sides rubbed. I am growing thin. Won't you make me whiskers now?"

"No, I will not," said Janet; "you caught that dear little snow-bird, you bad thing! Scat! scat!"



She clapped her hands and the cat ran out of sight. The Kanter girls walked on and on, till

they came to a great snow-wall, but there was a gap in it.

"Shall we go through?" asked Prue.

"Yes, of course," replied Janet. So they went through.

"I don't think it is so pleasant in this field," said Prue, when they had gone a short distance. "The wind blows, and the woods are near."

"It is growing cloudy too," said Janet, "but I want to see what there is over by that hill. I am sure there is something moving."

There certainly was, and Prue could hardly repress a scream when five white figures, coming from the direction of the hill, confronted them. The figures themselves paused and looked startled.

"You are strangers," said one of them gently. "Please stand aside so that our sheep will not be frightened. A storm is rising, and we are leading them home."

Then for the first time the children saw that there were numbers of sheep crowding along behind the men. They were so white that at a little distance they had not been distinguishable from the snow drifts.

There was a large tree near by, and the children,

turning that way, took shelter beneath its crystal boughs. The men went on and their flocks followed them.

"They are shepherds," said Janet, under her breath.

"I think we had better follow them ourselves," whispered Prue, "if there is a storm rising."

"Well, in a few minutes, perhaps," said Janet. "You see they have left quite a path where they have trodden, so we cannot get lost. And there are some more sheep over on the side of the hill; how pretty and peaceful they look! I wonder why they did not go with the rest. They seem so gentle that maybe they would not be afraid of us if we went to them."

"Hark!" said Prue, "I hear someone singing."

"I hear it too," said Janet, listening; "it sounds high up but not far away."

And then they both saw a figure coming down the hillside, singing as he came, and the sheep raised their heads and looked at him, bleating.

"That's their shepherd," whispered Prue.

The sky was now becoming quite dark with clouds, and the shepherd on reaching his flock spoke to them, and as he called they followed him.

"He is coming this way," said Janet; "he is go-



THE SHEPHERD.

ing home like the rest. We will go with him, Prue."

The shepherd now drew near them, with the sheep pressing behind him. Already the snow was falling and obliterating the path. It seemed like a wild and stormy waste all around them, and strange sounds, perhaps of the wind, were heard from the woods. The shepherd's face was so kindly in its expression, that Janet and Prue felt no fear in running up to him and walking by his side. He showed no surprise, and the sheep pressed their heads confidingly against the little girls, as all of them followed the way home together.

"How dark it is!" said Janet.

"It is only the storm that makes it dark," said the shepherd; "the sun is shining just the same, all the time."

"Yes, I know it is only the storm that makes it dark," answered Janet, stumbling and catching at his outstretched hand.

"I don't mind as long as I can see where I step," said Prue. "I'm glad we met you, for the other shepherds are quite out of sight."

"I always come with the last of the flocks," said the shepherd; "I know, then, that none are left behind."

On they pushed, through the falling snow, and could see so little way ahead of them, that the children were surprised when they suddenly found themselves at the garden gate. This was at the edge of the storm; no snow was falling in the garden, but little birds in all the trees were singing clear and sweet.

"Have you been teaching the birds to sing?" asked the shepherd, smiling.

Then he opened the gate for them, and told them to go inside, while he himself kept on to the sheepfold, to put his flock under shelter.

Going Home

XXVII

"'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home."
—*J. Howard Payne.*

"OH! I am so glad you have come back safe!" exclaimed Lily, who was waiting for them in the garden. "I have watched for you so long! Now let us go into the house, where we cannot see the storm."

"Wait till I get my canary," said Janet.

She caught the little bird easily, for it was very tame, and placed it in its wooden cage to carry home with her.

"She didn't bring it here to leave, you know," said Prue, fearing that Lily might feel sorry to see it go; but Lily was smiling and listening to the singing of the snow-birds.

The children then entered the house together by the door which led into the playroom.

"I think we had better go home," said Janet; "we have had a beautiful time, Lily, but we must go now."

"Provided the door opens," said Prue.

"I wonder if we left anything in the sleeping-room," said Janet, going to take a look at the row of pretty beds. "Why, Lily! see that dark head on the pillow! someone is in bed; who is it?"

Lily stepped forward rather timidly to look, and then she began to laugh.

"It is that little boy, Polo!" she said.

Janet went to him and shook him vigorously.

"Wake up, Polo!" she exclaimed, "see how you have tumbled the nice bed. What are you doing here?"

"I went to sleep," replied Polo, drowsily, rubbing his eyes; "but they didn't find me, did they?"

"We are going home now," said Prue, "and you must come too. Brenda and Henjee and Meemee went long, long ago."

So, Prue leading Polo, and Janet carrying the canary, they went to the snow-door, and met the snow-children just entering, laughing merrily, and quite ready for more games.

"We are going now," said Janet, "we have staid too long. We have had a good visit, and now we must go."

The snow-children tried to detain them, but in vain.

"Good-by, dear Lily!" "Good-by, all!" the Kanter girls called back, as they ran out under the open sky. And then the door in the snow-wall closed behind them, and they were among the little round huts again. Polo ran home at once, for he was tired and hungry.

"Come, birds, come!" cried Janet, without waiting, and the great, superb birds, circling in the air, came gently downward with the chariot. The Kanter girls climbed into it, side by side, and in five minutes they were hundreds of miles away from the land of snow, and going in at the door of their own little home.

"Did the Kanter girls always keep the invisible rings, and the plaid aprons, and the chariot?"

They did, until they grew up.

"Did they take more journeys?"

A great many more, but the record was lost.


THE END OF THE STORY